

Touring the Battle of Cool Spring

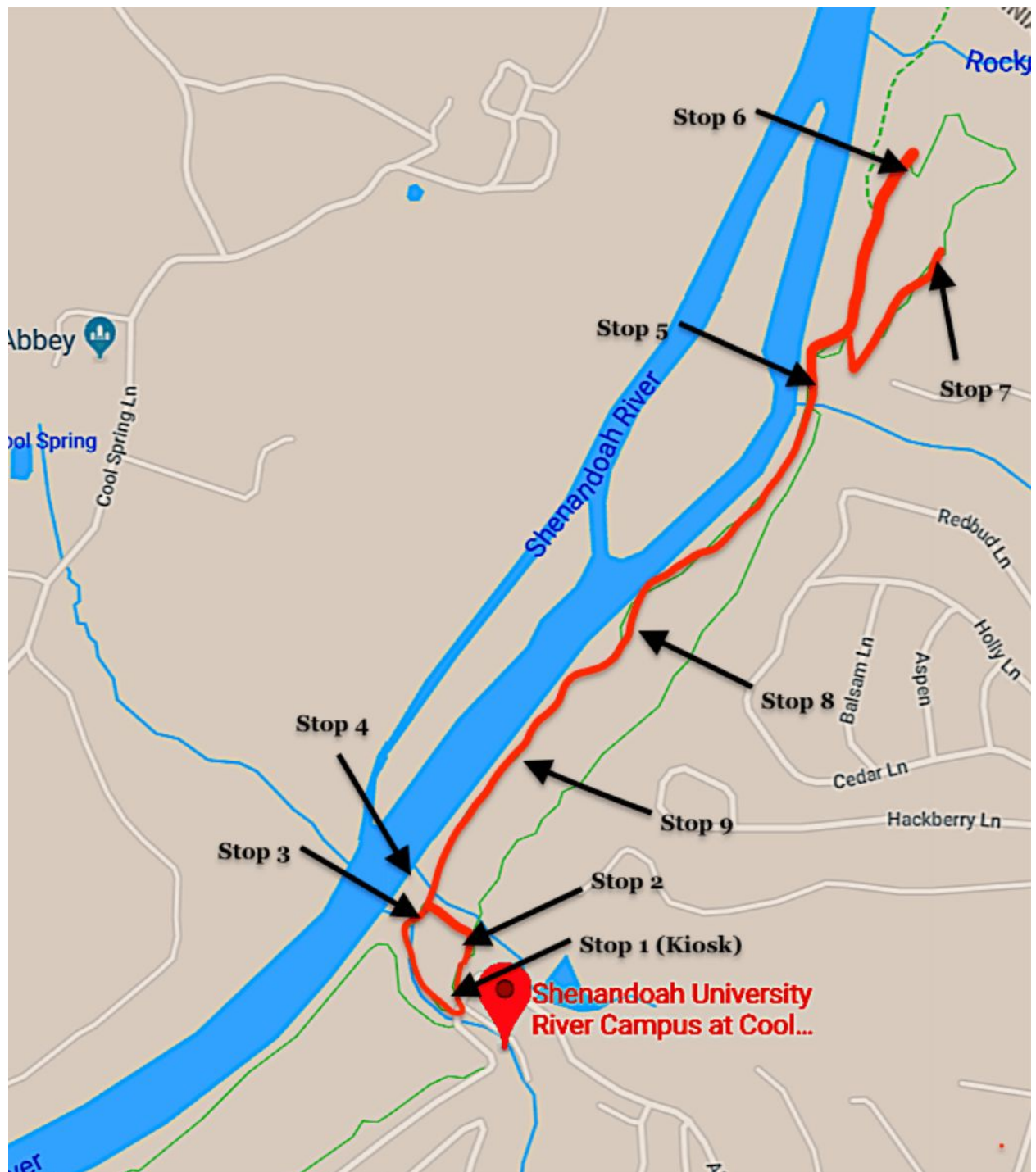
Welcome to Shenandoah University's Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Spring Battlefield.

On July 18, 1864, the 195 acres that now comprise the Campus at Cool Spring Battlefield played an important role in the Battle of Cool Spring—the largest and bloodiest Civil War battle fought in Clarke County. Shenandoah University invites you to use this guide to explore important elements of the Battle of Cool Spring. Please feel free to either take this guide home with you or return it to the kiosk after the tour, but whatever you decide please help spread the word about this valuable historic resource.

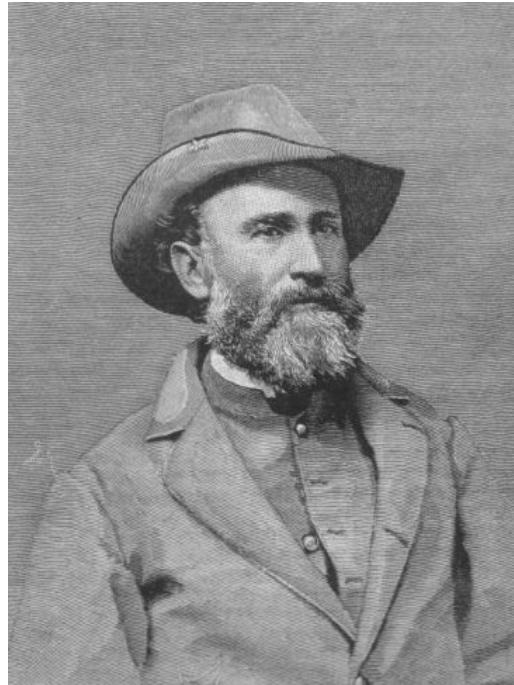
The tour begins at the kiosk located near the end of the parking lot located closest to the Shenandoah River. The walking tour is approximately 2 miles round-trip and takes you over some uneven terrain so please watch your step. Please see the trail map on the last page of this guide to assist you in navigating the property. Tour markers are also located along the trail to assist in navigation.

Follow the Stops Below to Tour the Battlefield

Self-Guided Tour Stop Map



Stop 1: Prelude to Battle (Kiosk)



Gen. Jubal A. Early

(From Battles & Leaders)

“We haven’t taken Washington, but we’ve scared Abe Lincoln like hell.”

Confederate general Jubal A. Early

After marching to within sight of the Capitol dome in Washington, D.C. on July 11, 1864, the capital of the United States seemed within Confederate general Jubal Early’s grasp. However, with the imposing Fort Stevens in his front and news that additional Union reinforcements were on the way to protect the capital, Early decided to withdraw on the night of July 12 and return to Virginia. Four days after Early withdrew he crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains at Snickers Gap and entered the Shenandoah Valley. While Early’s troops hoped to rest, a Union pursuit force commanded by Gen. Horatio G. Wright followed. On July 17 Union cavalry commanded by Gen. Alfred Duffie tried to drive Early’s pickets posted on the Shenandoah River’s western shore at Castleman’s Ferry (the place where the Berryville Turnpike crosses the Shenandoah River) but to no avail. Efforts by Union cavalry the following morning to drive Early’s pickets from Castleman’s Ferry proved equally futile. With a frontal assault no longer feasible Union generals Wright and George Crook agreed to flank the Confederate position by crossing the Shenandoah River approximately two miles downstream.

From the kiosk proceed back to the paved trail (located to your right if you are facing the kiosk) and turn left positioning yourself so that you are looking at the majestic white home “The

Retreat” and have a view of the road which passes to the left of the house. The distance from the kiosk to your next stop is .03 miles.

Stop 2: Col. Joseph Thoburn’s Division Begins its Flank March



Gen. Horatio G. Wright (From J. Noyalas, private collection)

“Send a force across the river and develop the enemy.”

General Horatio G. Wright’s order to General George Crook

During the time of the battle the home in front of you (currently a private residence so please do not trespass) was owned by Judge Richard Parker, best known for presiding over John Brown’s trial in 1859. Around 2 p.m. on July 18 Gen. Crook ordered Col. Joseph Thoburn to take his small division and Col. Daniel Frost’s brigade, approximately 5,000 men, to cross the Shenandoah River at Island Ford. John Carrigan, a local tailor in his mid-forties who served as a musician earlier in the conflict in the 2nd Virginia Infantry (CSA), helped Thoburn navigate narrow paths through the mountain to your front. Shortly before 3:00 p.m. Thoburn’s troops marched down Parker’s Ford Road which you can Gen. Jubal A. Early (Battles & Leaders) Gen. Horatio G. Wright (J. Noyalas, private collection) see situated to the left of Judge Parker’s Retreat. The original Parker’s Ford Road traversed the ground behind you and carried Thoburn’s troops to Island Ford.

From “The Retreat” continue on the path (with “The Retreat” on your right side) and proceed on the paved path, around the pond, turn left onto mowed trail and proceed to interpretive marker to your front near the Shenandoah River. The distance from your second stop to the third one is .10 miles.

Stop 3: Col. George Wells' Brigade Leads the Crossing at Island Ford



Col. George Wells

(From J. Noyalas, private collection)

"We crossed where the water was about breast-deep, and the bottom very slippery. After crossing we.... went to work throwing up light breastworks."

Private Benjamin S. Bogardus, 170th Ohio Infantry

Around 3:30 p.m. on July 18 Col. George Wells' brigade led Thoburn's advance to and across Island Ford. You can see the southern edge of Island Ford to your front. As Wells' men crossed here at Island Ford Confederate pickets from Maj. Jesse Richardson's 42nd Virginia Infantry attempted to block Wells' advance but failed. Wells' troops captured sixteen of Richardson's command during the crossing. As Thoburn's troops crossed the Shenandoah River Col. Thoburn questioned the Confederate prisoners who informed him "that the divisions of the rebel Generals Gordon and Rodes were within a mile or two of the ford, and that General Early was present." Fearful that his small command would be separated from the remainder of the Union army Thoburn appealed to his superior Gen. Crook "for further instructions." Crook promptly ordered Thoburn to not continue with his efforts to flank the Confederate position near Castleman's

Ferry, but instead “to take as strong a position as possible... and await the arrival of a division of the Sixth Corps.”

From this stop proceed closer to the Shenandoah River, keeping in mind personal safety at all times. The distance from your third stop to the fourth is .04 miles

Stop 4: Col. Joseph Thoburn Forms His Battle Lines



Col. Joseph Thoburn (From N. Picerno, private collection)

“I posted my command in two lines... the Second Brigade commanded by myself, on the right, the First Brigade, commanded by Colonel Wells, on the left, and the Third Brigade, commanded by Colonel Frost, in the center.”

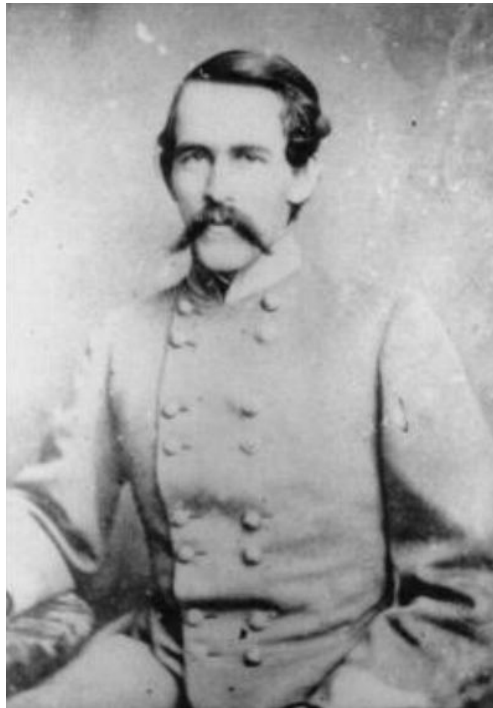
Col. Joseph Thoburn

Although trees on the opposite shore currently obscure the positions held by Thoburn’s troops, there are sometimes views of the ground on the river’s opposite shore through the trees to your left front. Col. Thoburn deployed his men in two main lines. After deploying skirmishers on an upland ridge just east of the Cool Spring house, Thoburn established his main line about seventy five yards from the river’s western bank. Thoburn established a reserve line “in an old road on the riverbanks behind a low stone fence,” a position Thoburn believed “afforded excellent protection” for his command. Around 5:00 p.m. Gen’s. Wright and Crook, from their perch atop the Blue Ridge, spied Confederate divisions advancing on Thoburn’s position. Crook implored Wright to withdraw Thoburn’s division back to this side of the Shenandoah River, but Wright

refused. Instead Wright told Crook that he intended to send Gen. James Ricketts' division across the river to support Thoburn.

From this stop return to the paved path. Walk along the paved path keeping the Shenandoah River on your left. As you walk on the path you will pass an interpretive marker on your right. Take a moment to read the interpretive marker and then continue on the path until you see a small bench on a rise to your left. The bench marks your next stop. The distance from your fourth stop to the fifth is .78 miles.

Stop 5: Col. Samuel K. Young's Dismounted Cavalry Retreats



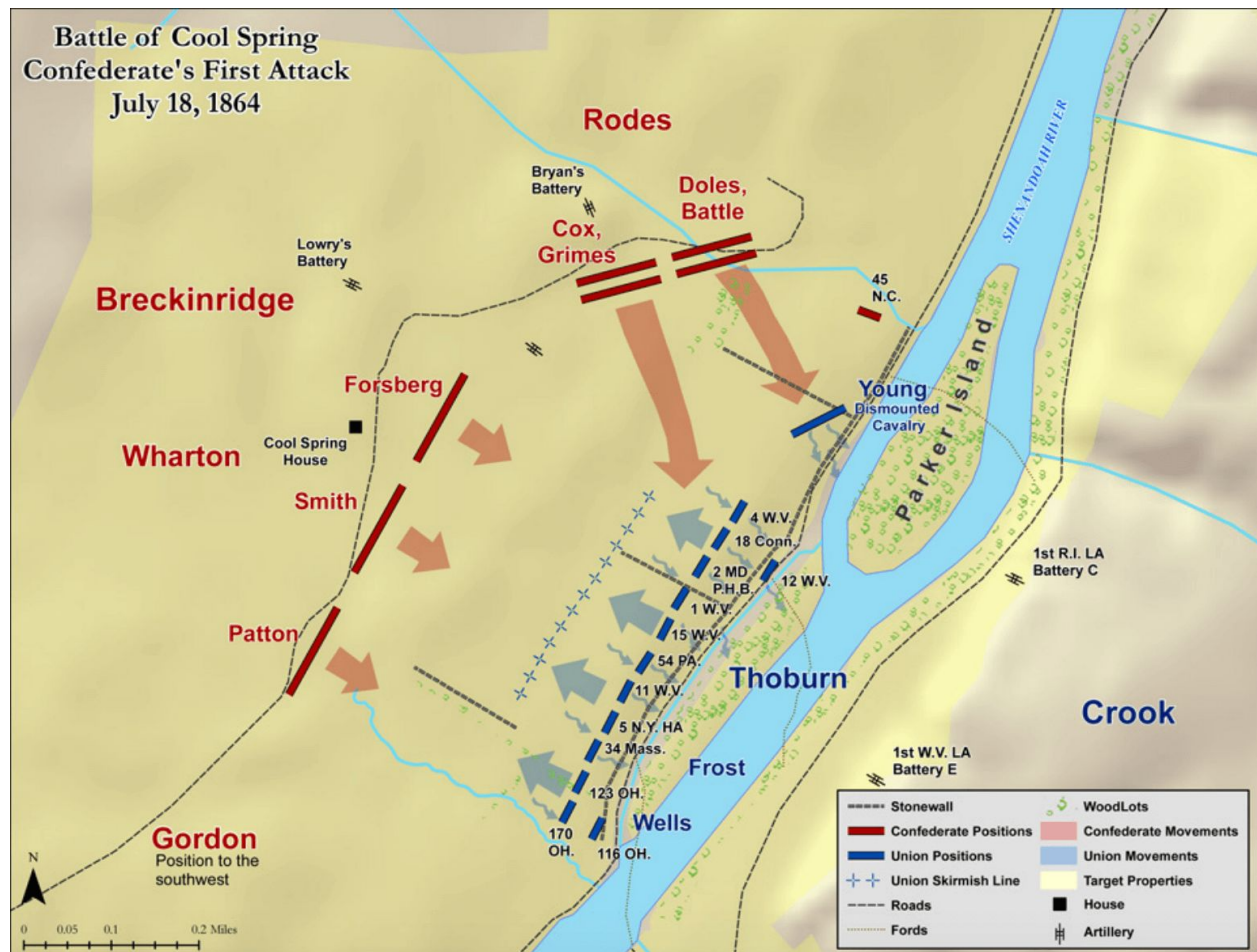
Gen. Robert E. Rodes (From the Library of Congress)

“The line of battle... was breaking in great disorder and retreating across the river... Col. Young was on the bank of the river trying to rally the men.”

C.E. McKoy, 1st Maine Cavalry, Young's Dismounted Battalion

As Confederate forces launched their attack Thoburn and his commanders thought Early's regiments would launch a frontal assault. None anticipated that Thoburn's right flank would be the focus of the Confederate attack. The Union right flank was located opposite of where you are now standing on the river's western bank. When Confederates from Gen. Robert Rodes' division charged toward Thoburn's right flank its defenders—a hodge-podge of dismounted cavalry commanded by Col. Samuel K. Young—did not put up much resistance. Many troops from Young's command broke and retreated across the river. While many of Young's men made it safely across to the area where you are now located, some drowned in “Parker's Hole”—an

extremely deep abyss amid the Shenandoah's otherwise fordable waters in July 1864. Parker's Hole is located to your front. With the retreat of the majority of Young's command to the Shenandoah River's eastern shore, the task of defending against Rodes' assault fell upon the shoulders of Col. John L. Vance's 4th West Virginia Infantry.



Map showing the initial Confederate assault. Island Ford, where Thoburn's division crossed, although not identified on this map, is the island in the Shenandoah River located south of Parker's Island. (Map courtesy of the Civil War Trust)

From Parker's Hole return to the paved path and continue on the trail keeping the Shenandoah River on your left side. Once the trail turns from asphalt to concrete stop and face toward the Shenandoah River. The distance from your fifth stop to the sixth is .17 miles.

Stop 6: Thoburn Tries to Meet Rodes' Attack



Lt. Col. Thomas F. Wildes (From Ohio in the War, 1868)

“Colonel Thoburn... was the coolest man on the field.”

Lt. Col. Thomas Wildes, 116th Ohio

Depending on the time of year and the foliage on the trees you can see some of the upland ridges on the river's opposite shore. You are now positioned opposite Thoburn's extreme right flank. In an effort to alleviate the pressure now being felt by Col. John Vance's 4th West Virginia Infantry—a regiment which had a portion of its members carrying discharge papers in their pockets—Thoburn repositioned his regiments to counter Rodes' attack. In addition to moving the 116th Ohio to his beleaguered right flank, Thoburn also ordered Col. Daniel Frost to wheel his brigade so that instead of facing west it faced north and presented a front to Rodes' division. In the process of maneuvering his brigade Col. Frost was mortally wounded, “shot through the bowels.” His wounding and the fire the brigade endured from Gen. Gabriel Wharton's division caused a panic, compelled his brigade to flee the battlefield and cross the river to the relative safety of the property now owned by Shenandoah University. While portions of Thoburn's command fled to this side of the river some believed it best not to cross until nightfall. Until dark the regiments posted on Thoburn's right flank—the 116th Ohio, 4th West Virginia, 12th West Virginia, remnants of the 1st West Virginia, Second Maryland Eastern Shore, 18th Connecticut, and a handful of dismounted cavalry from Young's command—remained and fended off three assaults by Rodes' division.

To get to the next stop reverse direction on the trail so that the Shenandoah River is on your right side. As you walk on the trail you will notice to your left a concrete trail moving up the slopes. Cross over the small strip of grass and take the concrete path moving up the slope. Follow the concrete path until you reach the flat area near the crest. Please note that this is a somewhat steep incline. The distance from your sixth stop to the seventh is .15 miles.

Stop 7: Artillery Support Arrives



Col. Charles H. Tompkins (From MOLLUS, US Army War College)

“Col. Tompkins... opened twenty guns upon them [the Confederates] and somewhat demoralized them... [the] batteries did some of the best shooting ever seen in modern warfare.”

Correspondent for New York Herald attached to Gen. Wright’s command

As elements of Thoburn’s command fended off multiple Confederate attacks Col. Charles H. Tompkins, Wright’s artillery chief, deployed twenty cannons to support Thoburn’s regiments. On the bluffs above you and to your right, if you are facing the bluffs, Lt. Jacob H. Lamb’s Battery C, 1 st Rhode Island Light Artillery took position and fired across the river. Two other batteries took position on the heights to your south—Battery G, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery and Battery E, 1 st West Virginia Artillery. While the Union gunners helped slow the Confederate offensive that evening, some shells fired from the heights in front of you—due to the closeness of Union and Confederate lines—occasionally landed among Thoburn’s command causing additional casualties.

Proceed down the concrete path and return to the original asphalt path. Please note that there are a variety of paths in this area so make certain that you are on the original path, the one closest to the river. Continue along the asphalt path (keeping the river on your right) to the area between Parker's Island and Island Ford. The distance from your seventh stop to the eighth is .41 miles.

Stop 8: Gen. James Ricketts Refuses to Cross



Gen. James Ricketts (From Battles & Leaders)

“General Ricketts... did not think it prudent under the circumstances to cross his men.”

Gen. George Crook

As you stand on the path with the Shenandoah River to your right, the area to your front was filled with troops from Gen. James Ricketts' division. Ricketts' regiments arrived in the area to your front around 6:00 p.m. As Ricketts' regiments readied themselves to cross and Thoburn continued to shift troops to his right flank Gen. Crook conferred with Gen. Ricketts' about the best place to cross. After seeing the great strength of the Confederate assault Ricketts refused to move his men across and support Thoburn. Angered, Crook then sought Gen. Wright's intercession, but Wright supported Ricketts in his decision. Wright believed nothing would be gained by sending Ricketts' division across the Shenandoah River. Troops in Thoburn's command disagreed and believed that support from Ricketts' regiments could have turned the battle's tide in favor of Union victory. Once all of Thoburn's troops crossed back to this side of the river after nightfall they encountered men from Ricketts' division who told them that they

wanted to cross the river and support them, but Gen. Wright and Gen. Ricketts would not allow it. Many of Thoburn's veterans never forgave Ricketts and Wright. One of Thoburn's veterans penned after the conflict that many of the men who fought on the west side of the Shenandoah River were "soured and chagrined" that they did not receive proper support.



5th NYHA Flags (From J. Noyalas, private collection)

Among the units engaged at the Battle of Cool Spring were elements of the 5th New York Heavy Artillery. In the war's aftermath veterans from the regiment sold photographs like the one you see above to raise money for the 5th New York Heavy Artillery Veteran Association. The unit's national colors proudly displayed its battle honors. Note on the far left side of the fifth stripe from the bottom the battle honor "Snickers Gap VA, July 18th 64." Union regiments oftentimes referred to the Battle of Cool Spring as the Battle of Snickers Gap.

Continue on the path keeping the Shenandoah River on your right side and proceed to where you can view the mid-point of Island Ford. The distance from your eighth stop to the ninth is 0.21 miles.

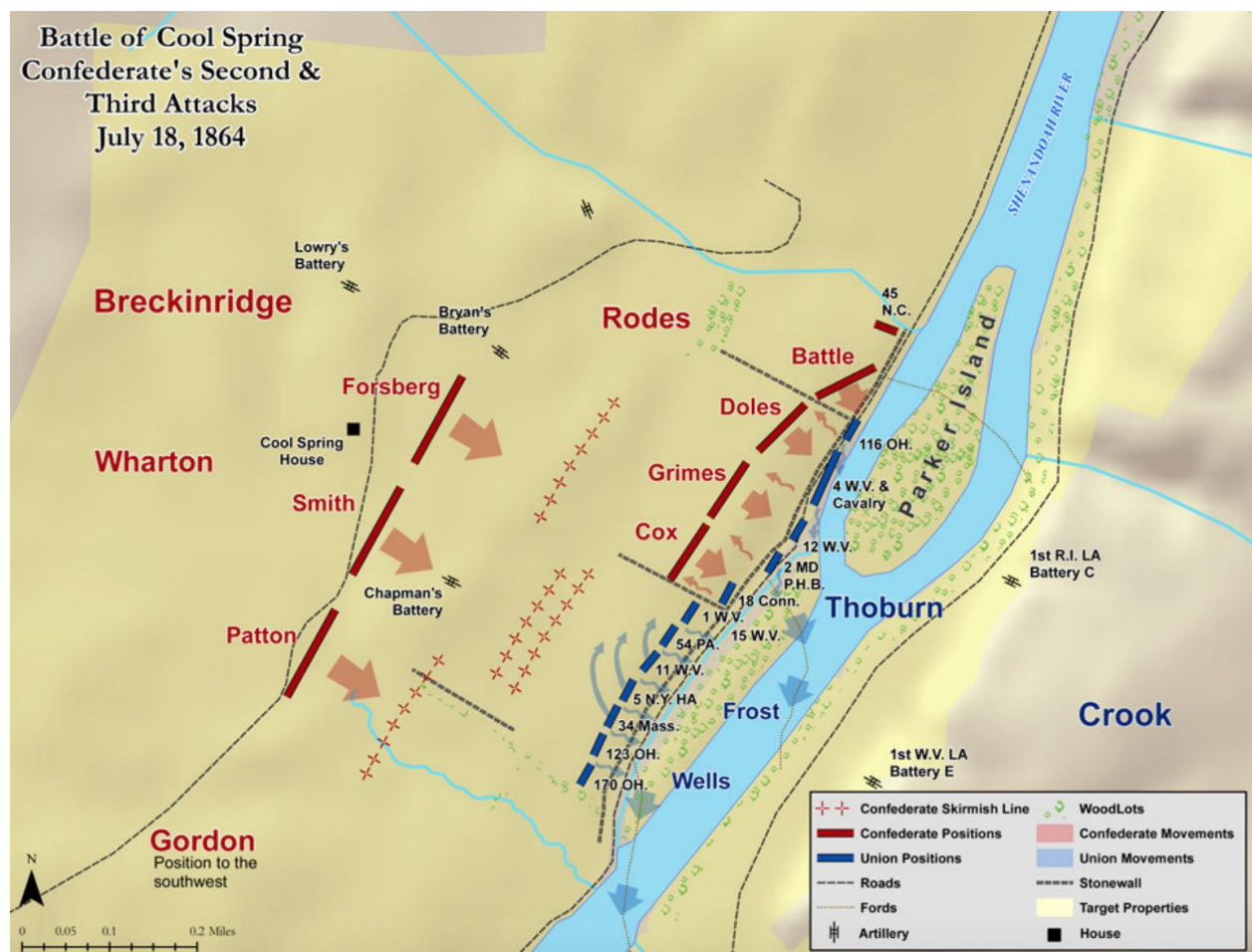
Stop 9: The 2nd Rhode Island Infantry Pickets the Eastern Shore

"I ordered my line to open fire which they did with much spirit. The rebels supposing we had the muzzle loading muskets would leave their shelter as soon as we fired and shout

some insulting message. But they soon found that the fire was kept up, my forty men doing the work of perhaps five times as many.”

Capt. Elisha Hunt Rhodes, 2nd Rhode Island Infantry

As Thoburn's men “lighted” fires “on the river bank” and prepared “coffee the soldier's elixir of life” a contingent of soldiers from the 2nd Rhode Island Infantry, commanded by Capt. Elisha Hunt Rhodes, picketed the river's eastern bank. Armed with seven-shot Spencer Rifles borrowed from the 37th Massachusetts, Rhodes' pickets could hear the groans and cries of wounded soldiers stranded on one of the islands in the river's center or on its western shore. At first light on the morning of July 19 Rhodes saw four wounded Union soldiers desperately trying to get to this side of the Shenandoah River. When Confederates opened fire Rhodes' command opened a furious fire allowing the wounded to get across safely.



Map showing additional Confederate assaults at the Battle of Cool Spring and route of retreat for some of Thoburn's regiments. (Map courtesy of the Civil War Trust)

This concludes your tour. Thank you for visiting Shenandoah University’s Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Spring Battlefield. You can follow the paved path back to the kiosk where you originally began the tour.

The Aftermath & Confederate Withdrawal

“Never since the sound of the rifle was heard in this beautiful Valley have the ‘sea green’ waters of the Shenandoah have been so reddened... as on this afternoon.”

North Carolina Standard, August 10, 1864

	Union Casualties (5,000 Engaged)	Confederate Casualties (8,000 Engaged)
Killed	65	80
Wounded	301	300
Missing/ Captured	56	17
Total	422	397

Throughout the day on July 19 pickets exchanged fire and occasionally one side fired an artillery shell across the river, but little fighting took place that day. While Union and Confederate troops stared at each other Gen. Early received some startling news at his headquarters in Berryville—that a Union force commanded by Gen. William Averell was marching from Martinsburg to Winchester. Fearful that Averell might strike his rear, Early pulled his army west toward Winchester and then south to Strasburg on the night of the 19th. With Early’s force gone, Union troops crossed the Shenandoah River on the 20th. As Union soldiers walked the ground on the river’s western side—Westwood and Cool Spring Farms—they saw some of their comrades killed in the fighting on July 18 half-buried, others “partly eaten by hogs,” and some stripped completely naked.

The Confederate success at Cool Spring would be among the last Confederate forces enjoyed in the Shenandoah Valley. After Early’s victory at the Second Battle of Kernstown on July 24 and

Confederate general John McCausland's burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, six days later President Abraham Lincoln and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant charted a new course for Union operations in the Shenandoah Valley by creating the Middle Military Division (popularly known as the Army of the Shenandoah). By the end of the first week of August, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan took command of the Army of the Shenandoah and by October 19—with victory at the Battle of Cedar Creek—Union forces finally wrested the Shenandoah Valley from a once firm Confederate grip.

Suggested Reading

Gold, Thomas D. *History of Clarke County Virginia: And Its Connections with the War Between the States*. Berryville, VA: Thos. D. Gold, 1914.

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