

BLUESTONE, WEST VIRGINIA

EAST | ANTIETAM, MARYLAND



LINDA SCHEIBER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

the waterway as "Momongosenka," or the "Big Stone River."

## em to be found n a river gorge

the community of Lilly, home to several hundred people and one of the first Appalachian settlements in what is now West Virginia.

"It was a very significant town at one point, and now it's been significantly reclaimed by forest," Bieri says.

What also makes this national park unique is the diversity of the species, both plants and animals — a result of the varying elevations of the site, Bieri says. The land around the river and the ancient gorge it carved offer a trail for visitors to hike and observe the beautiful vistas.

Kathleen Quinn, a lecturer at Northern Kentucky University, visited the Bluestone National Scenic River with family in March and stayed at a cabin at Bluestone State Park. At night, she and her family gazed at the stars.

"For us I think mainly it was the nature — just kind of getting away from the urban environment that we live in, interacting with the animals and the plants," she says. "And we stayed in a very nice cabin. It was very quiet, peaceful."

## Tide of Civil War began to turn here

Adam Sylvain

Special for USA TODAY

**W**hen he was deputy commander of the U.S. Army Center of Military History in the early 1990s, Col. Joseph Gesker organized outings to Antietam National Battlefield for military dignitaries.

After retiring from the military, he spent 18 years teaching U.S. history in Northern Virginia. In that job, too, he oversaw frequent field trips to Antietam.

Though there are other Civil War sites to visit, like Gettysburg to the north or Manassas just 30 miles west of Washington, Gesker says Antietam sets itself apart due to the relative ease of navigating its pristine battlefields.

"Of all the (Civil War) battlefields, it's the best preserved," he says. "The environment is pretty close to what it was back then."

The Battle of Antietam, fought on Sept. 17, 1862, was the single bloodiest day in American military history, with more than 22,000 Union and Confederate troops killed or wounded.

There's no better vantage point to survey the landscape than from the 60-foot observation tower located at the foot of Bloody Lane, which marks one of three battlefield locations where Union forces struggled to beat back the outnumbered but well-positioned Confederate soldiers.

From the observation deck of the tower, visitors can visualize the entire battlefield and consider how the rival armies fought the pivotal battle.

Gesker recalls walking the battlefield grounds with his students, explaining the intricacies of the battle. "It's pretty compact, and you can appreciate Gen. Lee's masterful use of interior military tactics," he says.

Despite what some have called a "tactical defeat" by Gen. George McClellan, history has held up Antietam as the first in a series of major Union victories that turned the tide of the war.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Cannons mark key positions at Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland.

### ABOUT THE PARK

**SIZE:** 3,200 acres

**VISITORS:** 347,180 in 2015

**ESTABLISHED:** In 1890, Congress passed a law aimed at "surveying, locating, and preserving the lines of battle." The War Department supervised this undertaking at Antietam and four other Civil War battlefields. The five parks were transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. Since then, the Antietam site has grown from 65 acres to more than 3,000 acres.

**HISTORY:** On Sept. 17, 1862, Union and Confederate soldiers battled for 12 hours on the farms surrounding Sharpsburg and on the banks of Antietam Creek. The next day, the Confederate army retreated to Virginia, ending the first invasion of the North and providing President Abraham Lincoln the opportunity to issue the Emancipation Proclamation five days later.

**WHEN VISITING:** Start at the visitor center and view a 27-minute introductory film, narrated by James Earl Jones. Ranger-led battlefield talks are offered at the visitor center twice daily. You can take the self-guided 8.5-mile auto tour through the battlefield or trek on 12 miles of trails.

**OF NOTE:** The park also includes Antietam National Cemetery, burial site for 4,776 Union soldiers. The cemetery was dedicated in 1867 on the fifth anniversary of the battle.

### ABOUT THE PARK:

**SIZE:** 4,310 acres

**VISITORS:** 36,733 in 2015

**ESTABLISHED:** 1988

**HISTORY:** In the 1600s and 1700s, Native Americans used the river for travel, referring to it as "Momongosenka," or "Big Stone River." White settlers arrived in the late 1700s.

**WHEN VISITING:** The park is open 24 hours a day and can be accessed by either Bluestone State Park or Pipestem Resort State Park.

**OF NOTE:** On Saturdays from May 29 through Oct. 8 at 10 a.m., visitors can participate in the Bluestone National Scenic River Walk alongside the river for a mile and then return to Pipestem Resort State Park. This year, on the first Saturdays of July, August and September and the first Sunday in September, visitors can partake in the Bluestone Turnpike Hike at 10 a.m. The 9.5-mile hike lasts four to five hours.