

THE BATTLE OF BUFFINGTON ISLAND

Tour Directions

Start the tour at the Ohio History Connection's Buffington Island Battlefield Memorial Park, located at 56890 Ohio River Scenic Byway (OH-124), Portland, Ohio. The Battlefield Museum (open by appointment) is located next door at the Portland Community Center, 56896 OH-124.

1. The Battlefield Memorial Park contains plaques, monuments, interpretive signs and maps describing the battle. This is the general location of Morgan's second line of defense as his men retreated north.

Turn south onto OH-124. Drive 1.1 mile to Barringer Ridge Road and turn right. Turn around and park in the berm of eastbound Barringer Ridge Road, close to the highway.

2. Look south along OH-124. General Judah's brigade halted in column on the highway waiting for the lead troops to find Morgan in the dense fog. They found him and were driven back into the fields across OH-124 to the left. In the fields behind you, Judah's counterattack began. The Daniel House (0.3 mile east, with upper porch) was used as a hospital during the battle. Union major Daniel McCook was fatally wounded in front of the modern house 0.1 mile beyond, where the battle began with Judah's troops trapped on the highway. Most of the battle's Union casualties occurred there, and Judah lost an artillery piece in this fighting. Over 30 Union soldiers were captured but later liberated.

Turn left (north) onto OH-124. In 0.6 mile, park on the highway berm in front of the monument with the stone wall.

3. The monument here is a memorial to Major Dan McCook, one of two patriarchs of the "Fighting McCooks." Here was the site of the Marietta Militia redoubt, which guarded the Lower Ford (130 yards southeast). On the ridge to the west is where Duke placed two Parrott cannons to guard against Union forces either from the south or from the ford. Judah's cavalry fought Duke's men in the fields behind the Williamson House (which stands across OH-124, just to the south) and between here and Old Portland Road. Duke lost both cannons in the intense action.

Continue on OH-124. From here, the Civil-War-era road ran along the river; OH-124 did not exist. After 0.3 mile, turn right onto Old Portland Road. Go nearly 0.4 mile and park in front of the interpretive sign.

4. Facing the river, to the right is the Upper Ford that Morgan and his men planned to use to reach West Virginia. Buffington Island was about 400 yards longer than it is today, and you can just see the tip to your right. Over 0.2 mile north (left) begins the original Portland Road used by Morgan's men to escape the deadly crossfire from the Union forces. Morgan had dozens of wagons of supplies and plunder parked here during his stay. They proved to be easy targets for the Union gunboats that joined in the battle. The raiders drove the wagons northward.

Continue on Old Portland Road for over 0.3 mile, past the curve, to an unmarked grassy lane. Turn right, go to the end of the lane, and park.

5. This is the location of the Civil War town of Portland. Modern Portland was moved to higher ground in the early 20th century due to constant flooding. This cobblestone steamboat landing dates to the 1840s. Men of the 9th Tennessee Cavalry repaired five boats here they had found to help in the crossing, and 110 of these men successfully reached the West Virginia riverbank before the battle began. Near the midpoint of the battle, Colonel Rutherford Hayes's 23rd Ohio and 13th Virginia (U.S.) infantrymen landed here on steamboats. Lt. William McKinley was among the Ohioans. Soldiers carved their initials into the retaining wall.

Return to Old Portland Road; turn right. Drive 0.2 mile and turn left onto Sarson Road. Proceed to the next intersection, which is OH-124. Turn left. In 0.1 mile, turn left onto Browning Cemetery Road. Drive 0.3 mile to the cemetery entrance and park. Face north. The cemetery is behind you.

6. Northwest of the cemetery are the fields where Judah's and Hayes's men formed to assault Duke's raiders, who held the bottom of Morgan's 'L' defensive line from behind fences along Sarson Road. Duke's men broke when Judah's Michiganders outflanked them along the Old Portland Road. Lack of ammunition precipitated Morgan's rout.

Return to OH-124; turn right. After 0.3 mile, turn left onto Bald Knob-Stiversville Road. Drive 0.2 mile and park in the small lot on the left, just beyond the interpretive sign.

7. Here two regiments of Colonel Johnson's brigade established the side portion of the 'L' defensive line. Johnson's men briefly held back Kautz's Ohioans but retreated into the fields to the northeast when the 11th Michigan Battery fired from the rise in the road ahead, from which spot Sanders's Michigan cavalry charged into the exposed Confederates. Look east for a panorama of Morgan's campsite of July 18th.

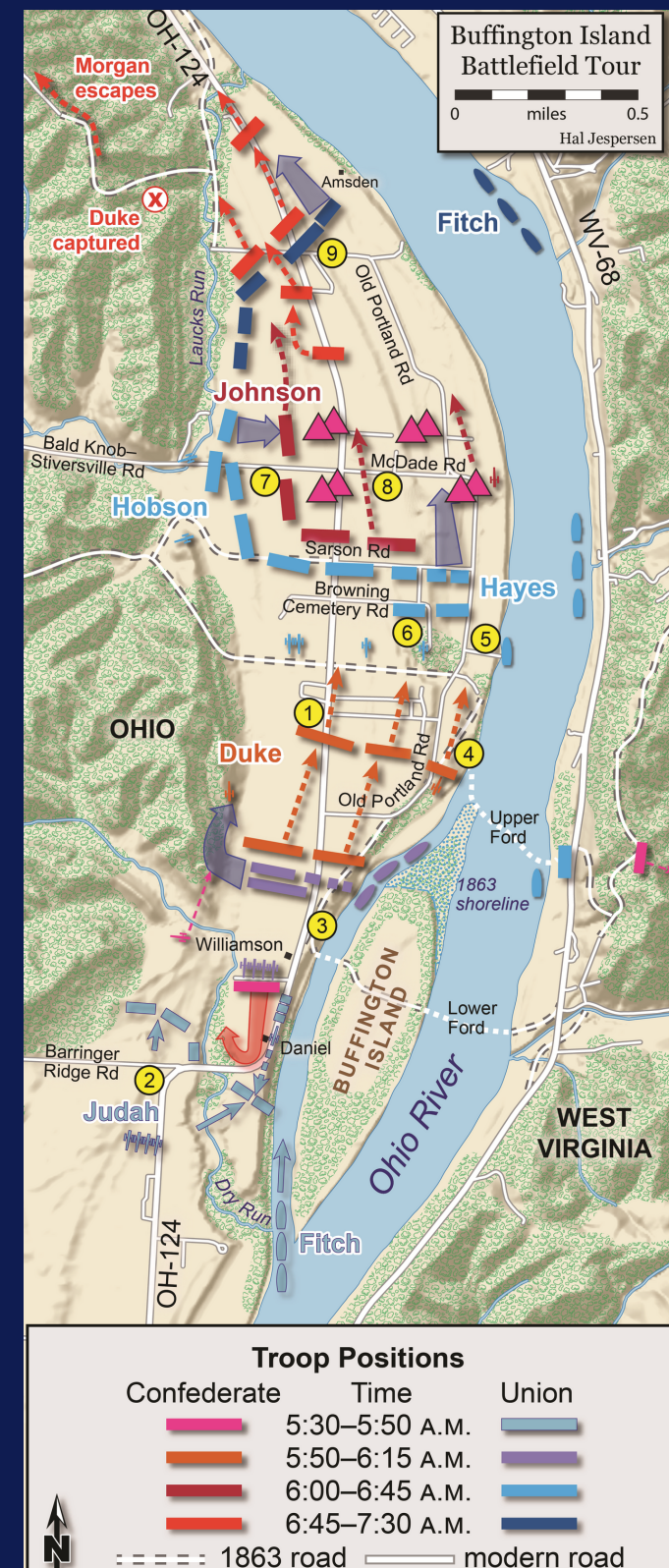
Return to OH-124; go straight onto McDade Road. Proceed 0.1 mile and pause. Look at the flat area to your right front.

8. This area is the site of Tunis Middleswart's house, where Morgan (and later Hobson and Judah) set up headquarters. Morgan's men camped around the house and in the fields surrounding it. Fitch's gunboats blindly fired 24-lb shells into the camps, making the area a scene of pandemonium among the raiders trying to flee northward out of the valley. Captain Byrne's two field howitzers failed to stop the gunboats.

Continue on McDade Road for nearly 0.2 mile and turn left onto Old Portland Road, the only wartime road to lead north out of the valley. Drive 0.9 mile and park on the right side before the interpretive sign.

9. Morgan and his men escaped down the lane in front of you, into the woods and across Lauck's Run. In this area, some of the most ferocious fighting of the battle occurred. Major Bullitt's 6th Kentucky Cavalry fought three delaying actions in the fields to the southwest. Sanders's Michiganders charged into Colonel Duke's men, who made a rear-guard stand in the fields to the right but had to abandon on Old Portland Road their artillery, wagons and ambulances containing 100-200 raiders.

Turn left onto OH-124. It's 1.4 mile to the Battlefield Memorial Park.



CONFEDERATE FORCES ENGAGED IN THE BATTLE

BG John H. Morgan's Division

COL Basil Duke's Brigade (890 men)

2nd Kentucky Cavalry

5th Kentucky Cavalry

6th Kentucky Cavalry

9th Kentucky Cavalry (Co. A)

9th Tennessee Cavalry

COL Adam Johnson's Brigade (870 men)

7th Kentucky Cavalry

8th Kentucky Cavalry

10th Kentucky Cavalry

11th Kentucky Cavalry

14th Kentucky Cavalry

CAPT Edward Byrne's Battery (4 guns & 60 men)

Note: A fifth gun was reported abandoned on the field. Morgan captured this rifled iron cannon from Union militia during the raid.

UNION FORCES ENGAGED IN THE BATTLE

BG Henry Judah's Brigade (1,100 men)

5th Indiana Cavalry

14th Illinois Cavalry

11th Kentucky Cavalry (Co. B)

8th Michigan Cavalry (Co. I)

9th Michigan Cavalry (Cos. C, K)

5th Indiana Cavalry Battery (2 guns)

14th Illinois Cavalry Battery (4 guns)

Henshaw's Illinois Battery (2 guns)

BG Edward Hobson's Provisional Division

COL August Kautz's Brigade (200 men)

2nd Ohio Cavalry

7th Ohio Cavalry

COL William Sanders's Brigade (250 men)

8th Michigan Cavalry (10 cos.)

9th Michigan Cavalry (Cos. A, B, F, L)

11th Michigan Battery (2 guns)

COL Frank Wolford's Brigade

Not on the field. Positioned at Bashan, OH.

BG James Shackelford's Brigade

Not on the field. Positioned at Bashan, OH.

BG Eliakim Scammon's Division

COL Rutherford Hayes's Brigade (970 men)

23rd Ohio Infantry

13th Virginia (U.S.) Infantry

U.S. Navy (210 sailors & 50 artillerists)

USS *Moose* - LT CMDR LeRoy Fitch

Imperial - CAPT Frank Oakes

Allegheny Belle - PILOT John Sebastian

THE BATTLE OF BUFFINGTON ISLAND

Timeline

July 18, 1863

8:00 PM

Morgan and his men arrive in the Portland valley and decide to wait until dawn to cross the river due to the darkness, the unexpectedly high river depth and the danger of attacking at night the Union militia in the redoubt guarding the Lower Ford.

July 19, 1863

4:45 AM

Colonel Duke attacks, only to discover that the militia had secretly abandoned the redoubt and had disabled its artillery. Morgan orders his men to begin crossing at the Upper Ford.

5:30 AM - 6:15 AM

Duke's men advance 300 yards south in a dense fog and encounter Judah's men by surprise. Duke's outnumbered troopers gain an initial advantage but are soon driven back. While Fitch's gunboats fire into Duke's flank, Judah's brigade assaults Duke's thin line north of the Williamson House and, after sharp fighting, captures two of the raiders' artillery pieces and recaptures the Union cannon lost earlier in the morning. Duke's men form a second line farther north, but it soon crumbles.

6:00 AM

Hobson's men attack down Bald Knob-Stiversville Road into Morgan's right flank, defended by Colonel Johnson's brigade. Duke retreats to join his right flank with Johnson's left.

6:15 AM - 7:15 AM

When the Union gunboats blindly lob cannon shells into Morgan's 'L'-shaped battle line, the raiders receive enemy fire from three directions. They fall back to the north end of the valley and fight several rear-guard actions as they retreat over Lauck's Run. All of Morgan's artillery, wagons and ambulances are lost. Most of Morgan's sick and wounded accumulated during the raid are captured by Union troopers.

7:30 AM

Surrounded in a ravine near Lauck's Run, Colonel Duke and about 50 of his men surrender, but their stand allows Morgan and 1,050 raiders to escape to continue the raid. Other groups of raiders, amounting to 550 men, are captured in Meigs and Gallia counties and in West Virginia. In addition to 100-200 sick and wounded left behind in the ambulances, Morgan loses 57 raiders killed, 63 wounded and 71 captured on the battlefield. Union casualties number 6 killed and 20 wounded.

THE BATTLE OF BUFFINGTON ISLAND

THE LARGEST CIVIL WAR BATTLE FOUGHT NORTH OF THE OHIO RIVER *A Self-Guided Tour*

The Battle of Buffington Island, the climax of General John H. Morgan's Great Raid, was fought on July 19, 1863. The raid started at Burkesville, Kentucky, on July 2nd and continued through the states of Kentucky and Indiana before entering Ohio on July 13th at Harrison. Morgan and his cavalymen rode through southern Ohio, foraging for food and fresh horses and fighting past Ohio militia.

Morgan's troopers were chased by 3,800 Union cavalymen led by General Edward Hobson, 1,100 Union cavalymen led by General Henry Judah, 2,400 Union infantrymen under General Eliakim Scammon, and eight gunboats under U.S. Navy Commander LeRoy Fitch. Finding other Ohio River crossings heavily defended, Morgan chose to use the ford at Buffington Island. Morgan's 1,930 men entered the Portland Bottoms on the night of July 18th and observed an earthwork guarding the Lower Ford that was manned by 250 militia with two cannons. Morgan decided it best to wait until dawn to drive off the earthwork's defenders and cross back into friendly territory. Morgan did not know that the Federal pursuers were much closer than he thought.



This brochure is provided by the
Buffington Island Battlefield
Preservation Foundation
(buffingtonislandbattlefieldfoundation.org)
in conjunction with the
Portland Community Center
(facebook.com/PCCPortlandOhio)
and the
Ohio Civil War Trail Commission.