

Crampton's Gap Battlefield

Touring the Crampton's Gap battlefield by automobile allows ample time to survey it. Two-thirds of this historical ground remains privately owned, its upper third embodied by Gathland State Park. Public access is via Burkittsville's Main Street. Burkittsville, essentially a one-street town, was called Harley's Store or Harley's Post Office from 1824 to 1828. Several sites are located where auto pull-over is not readily available. Please take care not to impede traffic. This route is lightly traveled on weekdays except in morning and late afternoon. Burkittsville residents are friendly, easy-going folks well aware of their historical ground. Common sense courtesy should be kept in mind.

STOP 1:

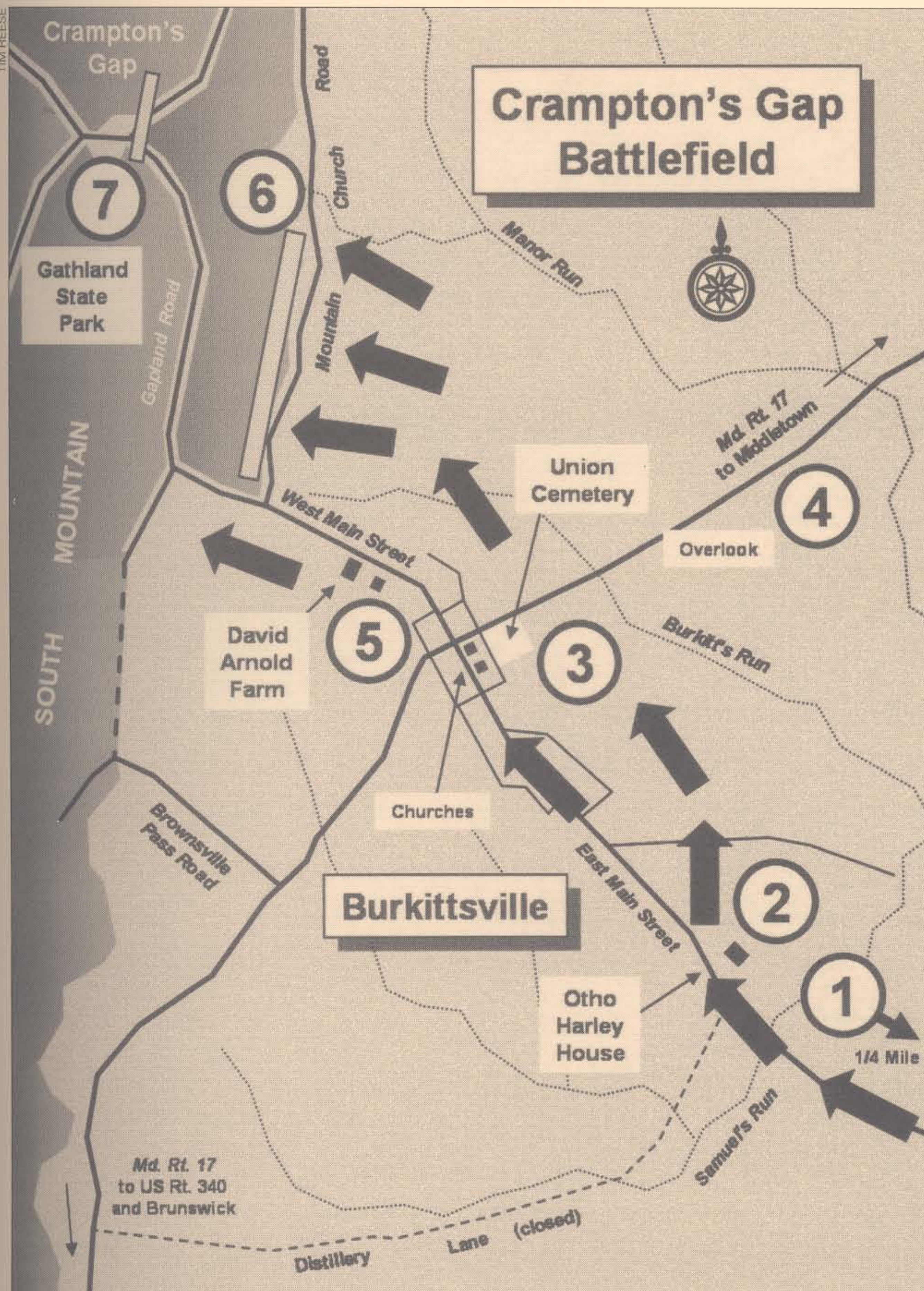
Martin Shafer House, Gen. William B. Franklin's Headquarters Your tour begins at the intersection of Gapland Road (Main Street) and Catholic Church Road one quarter mile east of town. As Franklin's Sixth Corps column marched toward town from Jefferson, Franklin's headquarters entourage peeled off onto the Shafer farm. Franklin's tents were erected in the paddock immediately behind this house. From this vantage point you can clearly perceive the distance between Crampton's Gap, just to the right of town, and Brownsville Pass, the shallow dip in the South Mountain ridge line one mile south (left) of the gap. This is as close as Franklin got to the battlefield until it was all over. The bow-front addition on the house's right (east) side is of postwar construction.

Stop 2:

Otho Harley House, First Contact

Proceed back to town the way you came and slow down as you ascend from the ravine watered by Samuel's Run. When the head of Franklin's column, the 96th Pa. Infantry, reached this point it came under long-range Confederate artillery fire from Brownsville Pass. Open fields south of town made hazardous any approach in this direction. As the 96th took position in Distillery Lane, the balance of Franklin's First Division traversed Harley's front yard to take cover in the low wooded ground northeast of town. Opposite Harley House, Distillery Lane remains a primitive country road outlined by stone fences, underbrush and trees, and is now closed to traffic.

Grandson of the town's founder, Otho Harley's farm was heavily abused by Union troops. Harley passed away shortly after the war. His widow and son filed a claim for compensation which was disallowed in the mistaken belief that Harley had been a Southern sympathizer. The family was ultimately forced to sell. After two centuries of continuous ownership, the farm left family hands. So ended the venerable Harley line in Burkittsville. Severely damaged by fire in 1899, the house was faithfully rebuilt to its original appearance.



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Catoctin History Tour #4

Stop 3:

Union Cemetery: Federal Advance

Continue your tour into town taking care to note the Federal and early Victorian-period houses to either side. Burkittsville appears much as it did in 1862. Union Cemetery [so-named because multiple churches use the cemetery, not because of any connection to the Union Army] is accessed by a driveway into the parking lot between the two churches, Resurrection German Reformed (left) and St. Paul's Lutheran (right). Both were used as over-crowded field hospitals. Take the cemetery drive around to your right taking care to avoid the stone driveway markers. Two driveways traverse the cemetery's back side, upper and lower. Park on either and dismount to take in the panoramic view.

From here you can see the wooded ground to your right where Union troops sheltered. Spread out before you is Burkitt's Ravine, traversed by (what else?) Burkitt's Run. Franklin's troops advanced from the woods across your entire front, right to left, in brigade battle lines three deep, nearly 6,000 in all. On the mountain side of the Middletown road (Rt. 17) regiments deployed into line of battle to engage Confederates on Mountain Church Road. The ground nearest town is more wooded now, so you may have to walk around a bit to see all angles.

TIM REESE

Burkittsville

Stop 4:

Overlook on Route 17

Return to Main Street and turn right toward Middletown on Route 17 and drive through Burkitt's Ravine to the far ridge. Turn around, and from the road's shoulder, behold the best view of town, battlefield and gap. Brownsville Pass appears on the mountain skyline near St. Paul's steeple.

Stop 5:

David Arnold Farm

Drive back into town and turn right onto West Main Street, pulling over where the street widens. To your left front stands the David Arnold Farm traversed by Vermont troops as they attacked the main Confederate battle line; New

Jersey troops attacked to your right. Arnold's barn partially screened the Union advance.

Stop 6:

Tritt Meadow

Continue out West Main and turn right onto Mountain Church Road. You are now following the main Confederate line of defense behind the stone fence at right. Continue until the road descends into a broad hollow. On your left are the meadow and house ruins of the Widow Susan Tritt. Union troops drove defenders into this meadow, then diagonally to upper right into the mouth of wooded Whipp's Ravine. From here fighting moved up the mountainside into the gap itself.



David Arnold Farm

Stop 7:

Summit of Crampton's Gap

Here in the gap Confederates made their last stand at twilight. Union troops encamped throughout the gap for the night, then marched into Pleasant Valley next morning. Signs explain the battle and postwar site occupation. Return to town to access Route 17 or continue west to Route 67. Both join Alternate U.S. Route 40 and U.S. Route 340. Come back anytime. You are always welcome.

Tim Reese, a Burkittsville resident, is a freelance author, historian, tour guide, and principal advocate for the Crampton's Gap battlefield. For more information, see <http://home.earthlink.net/~tjreesecg/>.