

Behind the NC: The 1850s until today

The Civil War, and subsequent ecological disasters, left scars on the valley, but conservation efforts have paid off

By the mid 1850s the fortunes of Fort Valley were booming. To the north of the valley the profitable iron furnaces were running full-tilt day and night, while in the middle valley the wealthy populace continued to come over mountains in droves to “take the waters” of Fort Valley’s famous spa and to while away their summers in dancing, plays, and other gentle pleasures. Life was good, and the future could not have been brighter.

In less than a decade, however, Fortune would reverse herself. The opening volley of gunfire at Bull Run signaled the beginnings of a great Civil War, and once again the natural fortification of Fort Valley would be called upon lend itself to the protection of troops. The Confederate general, J.E.B. “Stonewall” Jackson, was to launch his famous Shenandoah Valley Campaign in which the Massanutten would become the jewel in the center of his plan.

The old courthouse at Woodstock, which earlier greeted stagecoaches full of spa patrons, now supervised the tramping back and forth of thousands of soldiers from sides, many of whom sought shelter within its thick stone walls while Stonewall Jackson made his headquarters next door in Lawyers’ Row. A few miles south in an old log home, now a bed and breakfast, Jackson called upon Jed Hotchkiss and made his famous request, “Make me a map of the Valley.”

In the early years of the Civil War the movements of the Federal armies down near the north and south branches of the Shenandoah River were closely watched by Jackson’s troops upon the Massanutten, and they signaled to another station on the Fort Mountain opposite Seven Fountains, near the Milford Road, then to Stony Man Mountain, southeast of Luray, and from there to other stations and on to Richmond, making a direct signal

communication from Winchester to Richmond.

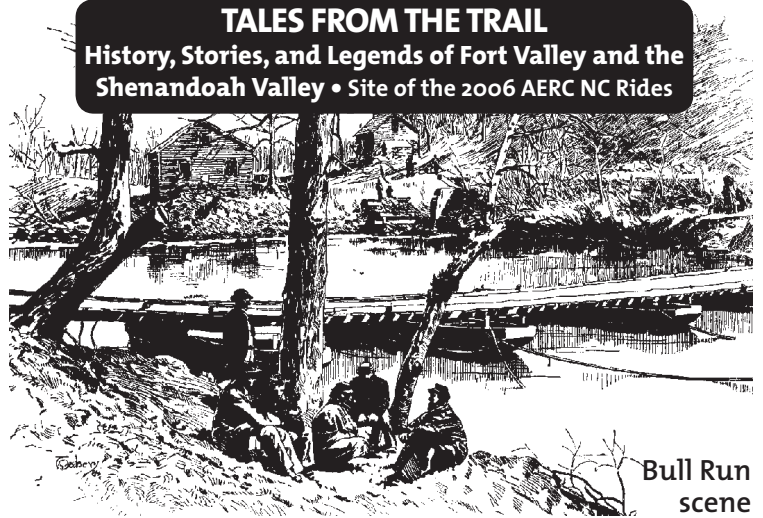
It was said the Jackson ran his troops up and down the Massanutten with such regularity that the Union Army finally refused to follow them up the steep mountains. There was even a little ditty composed by the Boys in Gray:

*Stonewall Jackson’s men were few
in the spring of Sixty-two,
But he kept the Blue-coats busy—
Fact, he almost made ‘em dizzy,
Stealin’ marches, quickly cuttin’
Round about the Massanutten.*

However, the roads cut over the mountains to facilitate iron wagons and spa stagecoaches now left the valley vulnerable to the invasion of marching armies. Throughout the Civil War, the fortunes of Fort Valley swayed back and forth as Confederate and

TALES FROM THE TRAIL

History, Stories, and Legends of Fort Valley and the Shenandoah Valley • Site of the 2006 AERC NC Rides



Bull Run scene

Union soldiers were ever-present.

The famous spa became the headquarters for a Union general, and while his tenure ensured that no major battles were fought in Fort Valley, by the end of the war the Valley was under siege. At Fisher’s Hill near the north end of the Fort Valley, a 195-acre tract of preserved battlefield recalls a Confederate defeat in September 1864.

Less than a month later Sheridan’s cavalry marched through Fort Valley, and continued on next page



You & Your Horse: Protect the Partnership

with Advanced Protection Formula (APF)

“I am impressed with the research behind APF. I believe this supplement is an important advancement in the feeding of endurance athletes.”

Jamie Kerr, DVM
Endurance Veterinarian
and Competitor

What does APF do?

- Provides proven support to the immune system
- Improves the adaptive response to athletic training
- Aids in development and maintenance of skeletal muscle
- Improves muscle recovery
- Minimizes effects of transport and environmental stress

Healthy As A Horse Network is an official AERC sponsor.

Another innovative, effective product from

www.HealthyAsAHorse.Net
Toll-free 888.653.4478

national championship news . . .

it was recorded that "...By night the sky glared redly and the earth was starred with bonfires" as most of the farm structures and stored grain facilities were torched by his men.

Looking down from Signal Knob at the northern end of the valley, the helpless Confederate soldiers could see endless clouds of smoke from the fires. Eventually Signal Knob was taken by the Union troops in a bloody fight. This cut off the important line of signal stations for the Confederate army, and eventually led to the fall of the Shenandoah Valley into the hands of the Federals. Breast works used by both sides in defense of Signal Knob can still be seen.

Post-war recovery and damage

The chaos of the Civil War left Fort Valley in ruins; her iron industry destroyed and her farm lands scorched and burned. But the natural resources of the valley continued to call to outside mining and timber interests, and by the 1880s the rapid rise in iron prices to fuel the country's Industrial Revolution brought profit to Fort Valley's iron furnaces once again.

However, it also brought devastation to the land. Repeated cuttings cleared the mountains, extensive mining caused massive erosion, and streams to become clogged with silt and pollution from filings. As a result of erosion, floods came more frequently and with greater damage. Miners, timber

operators and hunters pushed animal species like elk, white tailed deer and wild turkey to the brink of extinction.

Natural resource conservation

A small group of forest reformers recognized that natural resources were being exploited and endangered, and introduced bills in Congress that would protect the nation's forests. In 1891 the Forest Reserve Act was passed that authorized the creation of Forest Reserves, the forerunner of what was to become the National Forest System.

In 1911 the Weeks Act was passed, which made it possible for the federal government to buy deforested mountain land and protect it for watershed purposes. The Massanutten was among the first land considered for acquisition. In 1917, 954,000 acres in northern Virginia, including the Massanutten around Fort Valley, were combined to become the Shenandoah National Forest. This land was later renamed the George Washington National Forest to avoid confusion with the National Park bearing the same name.

The first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in the nation was in Fort Valley at Camp Roosevelt near the southern end of the valley. A total of 14 camps were eventually opened in the George Washington National Forest during the Great Depression of the 1930s, employing 9,200 men in Virginia during the nine years of the program's existence.

The work done by the CCC is still evident today in the roads, campgrounds, picnic shelters, fire towers, and other projects scattered throughout the National Forest, and observant trail users can find old CCC rock mile markers placed along the Massanutten Trail. Most of the eastern half of the 71-mile Massanutten Trail was constructed in the late 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps and various Forest Service trail crews, extending the historic use of General Morgan's road of 1777 and the 1850s roads into a multi-purpose trail open to all non-motorized uses and available for use year-round.

Long-distance trail completed

In the mid-1960s the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) proposed the idea of a long-distance circuit trail on Massanutten Mountain, and in 1989 the Forest Service and PATC finally began the cooperative effort to construct the western half of the trail on Massanutten Mountain. Volunteers working in cooperation with the Forest Service built much of the connecting 32 miles of trail over a 10-year period.

A missing section on the eastern half was constructed by the Old Dominion 100-Mile Endurance Ride Club, and The Virginia Happy Trails Running Club contributed various efforts on both the western and eastern sections.

In September 1988 the 100 Mile World (Endurance) Championship was held on the Old Dominion trails in the Massanutten. Out of 64 starters, 42 finished, with Becky Hart riding RO Grand Sultan to both the win and BC.

In October 2004 AERC voted to bring the 2006 AERC National Championship to this historic part of Virginia to test the best of modern-day endurance riders against the rigors and excitement of the Old Dominion and Massanutten trails in and around Fort Valley. A once-in-a-lifetime experience awaits all those qualified competitors this year as they take center stage—and their place in history—at the AERC National Championship at Fort Valley, Virginia. A ride along 400 years of our American history, all set in the glorious autumn splendor of the Massanutten Mountains, could never be this much fun.

So, set your sights for Virginia in October . . . and come join in the endurance festivities. The 2006 AERC National Championship trail awaits!

Trumbull Mtn. Equinox II

"We're with you for the entire ride"

- Now with set back stirrup bar and softer seat
- Monoflap; point and rear overlay billets, exterior thigh blocks
- Designed for the broad-backed horse
- Serge panels break in quickly, breathe and dissipate heat
- Crupper ring, plenty of dees
- Weighs 16 pounds

Available in black or brown,
med - xwide tree, 16.5" - 19" seat.
Demos available for one week trial
ride. **\$2595.00**



Trumbull Mtn. Tack Shop, Inc.

969 Trumbull Hill Rd.,

Shaftsbury, VT 05262

(800) 442 - 9672

www.trumbullmtn.com

saddles@trumbullmtn.com