Walk along the six miles of trails at Port Hudson State Commemorative Area and you’ll be back in the turbulent days of the War Between the States.

**Why Port Hudson?**

Control of the Mississippi River was important to both sides during the American Civil War. The North wanted to control the river and split the Confederacy in two. The South wanted to maintain control and ensure the flow of supplies back and forth across the river.

When New Orleans fell to the Federals in late April 1862, Confederate control of the Mississippi was in jeopardy. The Confederate army had already fortified the river bluffs at Vicksburg, Mississippi, but it needed another series of river batteries below the mouth of the Red River. The Red River was the primary route for the shipment of supplies from Texas to the heartland of the Confederacy.

The bluffs near the small town of Port Hudson represented a perfect site for the river batteries. These bluffs were the first high ground upstream from Baton Rouge and overlooked a severe bend in the river. This bend presented an additional obstacle for Union warships.

Following their defeat at the Battle of Baton Rouge on August 5, 1862, Confederate soldiers marched to Port Hudson and occupied the area on August 15, 1862. They constructed a series of river batteries along the bluffs and, in the months that followed, erected a 4½-mile line of earthworks to protect the land approach to the river batteries.
State Commemorative Area

48-Day Siege

The siege of Port Hudson began on May 23, 1863. Roughly 30,000 Union troops, under the command of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, were pitted against 6,800 Confederates, under the command of Major General Franklin Gardner.

On the morning of May 27, and again on June 14, the Union army launched ferocious assaults against the 41/2-mile-long string of earthworks protecting Port Hudson. These actions constituted some of the bloodiest and most severe fighting in the entire Civil War.

As the siege continued, the Confederates nearly exhausted their ammunition and were reduced to eating mules, horses and rats. When word reached Gardner that Vicksburg had surrendered, he realized that his situation was hopeless and nothing could be gained by continuing the defense of Port Hudson. Surrender terms were negotiated, and on July 9, 1863, after 48 days and thousands of casualties, the Union army entered Port Hudson. The siege became the longest in American military history.

Native Guards

Prior to the May 27 attack, a bold experiment was decided upon. Two African-American regiments were chosen to participate in the fight. The First and Third Louisiana Native Guards proved their worth by pressing an attack against a well-fortified Confederate position. This action was applauded in northern papers and led to the acceptance of African-American troops into the war effort.

After the siege, the garrison at Port Hudson became a recruiting center for African-American troops. The garrison remained there until the summer of 1866.

National Historic Landmark

In 1974, the Port Hudson battlefield was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. It joined a select group of properties which have been recognized for their importance in American history.
Living History Programs

Port Hudson State Commemorative Area hosts several living history events. Visitors can watch authentically costumed interpreters demonstrate Civil War weapons and equipment. For more information on programs, contact the Port Hudson State Commemorative Area.

Nearby Attractions:

**Audubon State Commemorative Area**—(South of St. Francisville on LA 965)—The nearly-200-year-old Oakley House is where John James Audubon drew inspiration and sketched many of the birds found in his famous *Birds of America*. The visitor may tour the house-turned-museum, formal gardens, an outside kitchen building and barns, walk the trails and enjoy a picnic lunch at the large pavilion nearby.

**Centenary State Commemorative Area**—(East College and Pine Street in Jackson)—This is the former site of Centenary College. Visitors may tour the old West Wing dormitory or a professor's cottage, and learn about the history of education in Louisiana. A Confederate cemetery is located on the grounds.

**Locust Grove State Commemorative Area**—(4 1/2 miles northeast of St. Francisville on LA 10)—Visit the gravesites of Sarah Knox Taylor, wife of Jefferson Davis, and General Eleazor Ripley, distinguished soldier in the War of 1812.

**Tunica Hills Wildlife Management Area**—(14 miles northwest of St. Francisville on LA 66)—Day-hiking, wildlife viewing, birding, and hunting (in season) are featured across 3,366 acres of rugged hills, bluffs and ravines.

**Historic Town of St. Francisville**—(North of Baton Rouge on US 61)—The Historic District includes 140 structures encompassing churches, antebellum homes, townhomes, cemeteries, and dozens of antique and gift shops.

**Historic Town of Jackson**—(North of St. Francisville on LA 10)—The Historic District covers two-thirds of the town and features more than 120 structures including banks, shops, homes, churches and warehouses.

**Historic Town of Clinton**—(North of Baton Rouge via LA 67)—The town is known for its historic architecture, including the East Feliciana Parish Courthouse, Lawyers Row, and charming Victorian and antebellum homes.

**LA Scenic Bayou Byway**—The Byway in this area takes you through some of the historic "Florida" parishes in English Louisiana known for the British influence in their architecture and cultural traditions. Follow US 61 and historic LA 10 (once known as the Choctaw Trail) to quaint historic towns, charming bed and breakfasts, country drives, profuse native wildflowers in season, excellent birding, cycling and interesting antique shops.
Port Hudson State Commemorative Area
(756 West Plains-Port Hudson Road, Zachary, LA 70791; 504-654-3775 or 1-888-677-3400) is located on US 61 in East Feliciana Parish, about 25 minutes north of Baton Rouge and 10 minutes south of historic St. Francisville. The 899-acre site encompasses the northern portion of the battlefield and features an elevated boardwalk over the breastworks in the Fort Desperate Area. Other facilities include three observation towers, six miles of trails, a museum, a picnic area and restrooms. Groups are requested to call in advance.