

Off The Beaten Path: New Guide To Battlefields Is 'Indispensable' For Serious Travelers

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Review

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

New guide to battlefields is 'indispensable' for serious travelers

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Miles, Jim *Forged in Fire: A History and Tour Guide of the War in the East, from Manassas to Antietam, 1861-1862.* Cumberland House Publishing, 2000-06-01. ISBN 1581820895

In **Forged in Fire**, Jim Miles puts his vast knowledge and experience to work in shaping a book that is both a history and a guide to military events in the East. No stranger to the Civil War, Miles has five previous books and more than one hundred articles to his credit.

Beginning with Fort Sumter and concluding with Antietam, **Forged in Fire** amply shows Miles to be a knowledgeable guide to the people and events of 1861-65. He provides thorough accounts of the major actions, with his narrative supplemented by extensive photographs, illustrations, and maps. There are also numerous sidebars with background information on related people and places.

Miles's chapters are organized chronologically, and a battlefield tour is included at the end of each. Also, a tour of Civil War Richmond is found with the chapter on the Peninsula, and a tour of Harper's Ferry/John Brown's Raid is placed with the Antietam chapter. The tours are well-planned and highly detailed. The directions appear easy to follow, though a few are less than specific ("In some manner get back on Main Street"). Miles takes readers to major points of interest, and to spots that are off the beaten path, such as the long-forgotten remains of the Francis Bartow monument at Manassas. He warns all readers about trespassing, and reminds everyone to respect private property, even if there are earthworks or monuments to be found.

The tours also offer excellent examples of the urgent need for battlefield preservation. All too often, Miles points out that a particular site no longer exists, an important house has been destroyed, or an earthwork eliminated.

This book is not for the casual tourist or the family looking to squeeze in some history on the way to the beach. It is a comprehensive guide to complex military engagements. Civil War enthusiasts and history students will find **Forged in Fire** an excellent resource for visiting battlefields and understanding the nature and scope of the events. Tourists who prefer their information in a quick and snappy format may find the book intimidating.

Forged in Fire is the first in Miles's planned series of four volumes that will cover all the Civil War action in the East. If following volumes meet the standard set in this book, Miles will have compiled an indispensable resource.

John E. Deppen will receive a Master of Arts degree in Civil War studies from American Military University in August 2000. He is the president of the Susquehanna Civil War Round Table.