

Visit Civil War Battlefields

Nestled on the banks of Virginia's Rappahannock River is the historic town of Fredericksburg and the storied county of Spotsylvania. Four major Civil War battles in this area left behind acres of signif-

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A new tour allows wheelchair users to experience four Civil War battlefields up close and personal.

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fields, trails, and roads that are otherwise inaccessible.

Each experience reportedly includes complete accessibility assistance. Tours feature a unique staff of experts made up of local historians, authors, and preservationists.

Learn About the Past
Founded by local Civil War

historian and documentary film producer Michael Aubrecht, AABT is reportedly the area's only tour service specifically catering to wheelchair travelers.

"I have a few friends in wheelchairs who are also history enthusiasts," Aubrecht says. "Until recently, I had no

includes a complete tour of the Sunken Road, Prospect Hill, and Slaughter Pen Farm. The three-hour trek is said to be safe, comfortable, and paced for wheelchair travelers and their families. They hear the whole story, even though they can't get to every hiking stop.

Aubrecht credits the generosity and help of others in establishing AABT. Mark Jones, a local historian and wheelchair user, and his wife Christine provided their experience and expertise by testing out battlefield locations, consulting on the accessibility requirements, and identifying safety concerns. Jones is also assisting Aubrecht as a guide.

The Right Stuff

The Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania National Military Park Service approved AABT's permit to conduct the specialized tours.

"We are using NPS staff historian Frank O'Reilly's outstanding title *The Fredericksburg Campaign* as the reference source for our presentations," Aubrecht says.

Troy Technologies (travelwheelchair.net), a travel-wheelchair company based in Los Angeles, donated two custom-made Pioneering Spirit Wheelchairs complete with the accessories required to make battlefield trekking on four wheels an enjoyable experience.

"None of this could have happened if we didn't have the proper accessibility gear," Aubrecht says. "Troy

Technologies really came through for us, and I look forward to sharing a long relationship with them. They are dedicated to expanding the freedom and mobility of wheelchair travelers.”

Visitors may use their own wheelchairs, if they are suitable. However, others may not have the proper equipment for traversing the fields, farms, and roads associated with these tours. Special chairs are available for a minimal rental fee. Portable ramps will further enable touring comfort and mobility. All tour stops are fairly level, with minimal grades, and are adjacent to parking.

For a small fee to cover guides and operating costs, AABT is offering a primary three-hour wheelchair tour to Fredericksburg Battlefield, as well as optional trips to Chancellorsville, The Wilderness, and Spotsylvania battlefields. Stops among these choices include the Spotsylvania Confederate Cemetery, Salem Church, and Ellwood. Special site requests may be accommodated if safety permits. AABT guides meet and greet patrons on site, at their location (home or hotel), or at one of the visitor centers.

AABT plans to offer special tours to the Wounded Warrior Project and find ways to benefit the Civil War Trust by bringing awareness to the importance of preserving battlefields.

All-Access Battlefield Tours officially opened for business on September 1

and was scheduled to begin booking weekend dates for the month of October. Tours will then run until mid-December, break for the winter season, and start up again in the spring.

Contact: pinstripepress.net/AABT.html / pinstripepress.net/AABTbrochure2011.pdf / 540-845-2767.

When in Rome...

Kristi Lacroix, of Wheelchair Escapes, recently spent a couple of days exploring Rome and checking out wheelchair accessibility. The first tour she took was of the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel.

“These can be seen and enjoyed by those using manual or power chairs,” Lacroix reports. “There are elevators and ramps. From the beginning of the tour inside the Vatican to the Sistine Chapel is a two-mile walk, up and down many stairs.

“I spoke with a lady who was viewing from her manual chair, and she said she felt like she was seeing everything there was to see.

“The art is unbelievable! It is everywhere—the floors, walls, and ceilings included. I have been to the Hermitage, but this was a world unto itself.”

The Colosseum was next on the list. An elevator is available, but no accessible bathrooms were evident.

“This was a very interesting tour with so much his-



In Rome, the art—especially in the Vatican and Sistine Chapel—is magnificent. Accessible tours allow wheelchair users to enjoy these and many other masterpieces.

tory,” says Lacroix. “It is still worth seeing even with renovations going on.”

Next Lacroix took a walking tour of the fountains, churches, Pantheon temple, and squares. She encountered a lot of cobblestone—but there are curb cuts.

“The Trevi Fountain was just beautiful,” she says.

Lacroix recommends a guide specializing in accessible tours: “If you just went to see these locations without hearing the history, you would miss so much. I felt the tour guides were excellent and really knew their stuff.”

She next took a cruise to Sicily, Greece, and Turkey. The Acropolis in Athens has an elevator and a lift. There is an elevator most of the way up and then you transfer (still in your chair) to a lift. A path area at the top is paved. There are many steps to get

up into the entrance. An elevator is around back; if you were not looking for it, you might not find it.

In Turkey, Ephesus is *not* accessible. It is difficult for an able-bodied person to maneuver the walk, which is very uneven. But, the Virgin Mary’s House and area is accessible with ramps and a wheelchair-accessible bathroom.

“If you go to Rome and other old cities, be aware their sewer systems are very old,” advises Lacroix. “Their pipes are really small. They cannot handle toilet paper, and many bathrooms run out of paper. Many places in Rome have no toilet seats. I recommend taking toilet-seat covers and tissues with you.”

Lacroix says costs in Europe are very high. The accessible tours will be expensive—but well worth it.

She also proposes an alternative way to travel: “An accessible cruise is a great way to travel for caregivers *and* wheelchair users. You unpack once and know you will enjoy the food, service, and entertainment on the ship. You will be cared for in English. You pay for the cruise in U.S. dollars and for anything extra you want on or through the ship. Then you can venture off for a few hours or all day to explore, always knowing the ship is close by. If you find a place that steals your heart, you can then plan a vacation there for another trip.” If you need a power chair or a scooter, a patient lift, a hospital bed, or oxygen, all these can be delivered to your cabin.

With more than 18 years of hands-on accessible-travel experience, Lacroix has contacts around the world to help make travel dreams come true.

Contact: 866-328-3596 / kristy@wheelchairescapes.com.

Paddlin’ Project

This past summer, Minneapolis-based Wilderness Inquiry, Inc. (WI) added a 20-foot pontoon boat, the *Clifford D. Crase*, to its regatta of canoes and kayaks.

The boat is named in honor of Clifford D. Crase, former editor of *PN* and *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* magazines, who died four years



The *Clifford D. Crase* pontoon boat is a safety and support vessel for canoe adventures on the Mississippi River near Minneapolis.

ago. At that time the Crase Sport Fund was established with the Paralyzed Veterans of America for memorials in his name. The donation of more than \$7,200 for the pontoon boat is the first from the fund.

The craft is used as a safety and support vessel for the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures on the Mississippi in the Twin Cities metro area. In cooperation with the National Park Service and the Missis-

sippi River Fund, half- and full-day paddles in ten-passenger Voyager wood canoes are offered to Twin Cities children, many of whom are disadvantaged, so they can learn about nature, view wildlife, and see the Twin Cities from an entirely new perspective. By summer’s end, more than 10,000 kids had participated in the canoe program.

“The pontoon boat is probably the best thing we have done this summer,”

says Greg Lais, WI’s executive director. “Not only is it a wonderful security and support vessel, but it is also a great platform to take donors out onto the river and see firsthand 240 kids having a great time.”

WI is committed to providing unique experiences to people willing to accept challenges. Many of its trips are truly wilderness travel adventures beyond participants’ comfort or confidence levels. Outings are

offered to all, regardless of age, background, or ability. Most WI adventures routinely include people with physical disabilities or mental challenges.

Contact: wildernessinquiry.org. ■