



Station 1: The Gate

Historical Evidence & Research Packet

Fort Duffield Heritage Committee • 2026

Research Packet for Visitors & Educators

A comprehensive research compilation supporting the interpretive panel and audio narration for Station 1 of the Fort Duffield Walking Tour. This packet includes primary-source references, engineering measurements, gate security notes, and historical accounts of the climb from West Point to the ridge-top fort.

1. Overview

This packet compiles historical evidence related to the climb to Fort Duffield, the guarded gate at the main approach, the fort's dimensions, and the daily movements between West Point and the ridge-top fortification. These materials support the Station 1 interpretive panel and audio narration for the Fort Duffield Walking Tour.

2. The Climb to the Fort: Primary-Source Evidence

Historical accounts consistently describe the ascent to Fort Duffield as steep, muddy, and physically demanding. Soldiers hauling supplies, tools, and personal gear faced difficult footing, deep mud, and slippery conditions. Wagons struggled to reach the ridge, and mules frequently lost footing. The climb was a daily hardship for the men stationed at the fort and a defining feature of life on the ridge.

Source Notes

Letter — 9th Michigan Infantry (1861)

Source Type: Soldier letter

Summary: Mentions wagons “scarcely able to make the ascent in wet weather” and men stopping to rest.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Soldier Letters

Recollection — 37th Indiana Infantry (1861–62)

Source Type: Soldier recollection

Summary: Describes the ascent as “steep and treacherous,” especially in wet weather.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Regimental Notes

Quartermaster Note — Supply Movement (1861)

Source Type: Quartermaster requisition note

Summary: Reports difficulty hauling lumber and tools up the ridge; mules slipping on the grade.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Quartermaster Notes

Oral History — Hardin County (1890s–1930s)

Source Type: Veteran or local oral history

Summary: Recalled the climb as “the worst part of the duty”; civilians refused to haul goods without extra pay.

Archive Location: Hardin County Historical Files, Oral Histories

3. The Gate and Security

A wooden gate stood near the main approach to Fort Duffield. Because the fort sat nearly 300 feet above West Point with sheer cliffs protecting most of its perimeter, this gate was

one of only two controlled entry points into the fort. Guards were posted here day and night to challenge anyone approaching from below.

The Toy-Lock Incident

Officers requested proper padlocks to secure the gate. The quartermaster depot mistakenly sent toy-sized locks, far too small to be useful. Soldiers joked that the locks looked “fit for a child’s playhouse,” though officers were frustrated by the oversight. This story appears in early Fort Duffield research notes and local oral histories.

Source Notes

Gate Lock Incident — Fort Duffield (1861)

Source Type: Local tradition supported by early research notes

Summary: Officers requested padlocks; quartermaster sent toy-sized locks.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Miscellaneous Notes

Guard Duty Notes — Fort Duffield (1861–62)

Source Type: Regimental recollection

Summary: Mentions guards posted along the approach road and at the gate day and night.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Regimental Notes

4. Fort Dimensions (Recorded in Rods)

Civil War engineers measured Fort Duffield using rods (1 rod = 16.5 feet).

The main enclosed fort measured:

27 rods long (\approx 445.5 feet)

10 rods deep (\approx 165 feet)

These measurements describe the central earthwork, not the extended rifle pits or outer positions along the ridge. The fort had two gates—one near the approach from West Point and another at the opposite end facing the ridge and outer defenses.

Source Notes

Engineering Notes — Fort Duffield (1861)

Source Type: Survey / engineering measurement

Summary: Records the fort as 27 rods long and 10 rods deep.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Engineering Notes

5. Map & Diagram Description (ADA-Compliant)

A top-down outline of Fort Duffield showing a long, narrow earthwork positioned along the ridge. The fort measures approximately 27 rods (445 feet) in length and 10 rods (165 feet) in depth. A gate is located at each end of the fort: the southwest gate faces the steep approach road from West Point, while the northeast gate opens toward the ridge and the outer rifle pits. The diagram shows the interior parade ground, surrounding earthwork walls, and the steep drop-offs on the south and west sides.

Source Notes

Diagram & Layout Notes — Fort Duffield (1990s)

Source Type: Researcher diagram notes

Summary: Provides layout descriptions, gate positions, and ridge-top orientation.

Archive Location: Fort Duffield Research Compilation (1990s), Diagram Notes