

History & Nature

The historic battlefield site was named for the natural feature where the St. Marks River goes underground for a short distance before emerging downstream, thus forming a natural bridge. Important historical, cultural and natural resources have been found on the property, dating from the Paleo-Indian period (10,000 B.C.) to the Civil War. Several First Magnitude Springs are located in the park, discharging more than 100 cubic feet of water per second.

The park is the site of Florida's second largest Civil War battle. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and prior to its preservation, Natural Bridge was cited as one of the top ten endangered Civil War sites by the Civil War Preservation Trust.

In 1865, the battle at Natural Bridge preserved Tallahassee as the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi that did not surrender to Union forces. During the final weeks of the Civil War, a Union flotilla landed at Apalachee Bay. The federal plan was to capture Fort Ward (formerly San Marcos de Apalache), located at the confluence of the St. Marks and Wakulla Rivers, and march north to the state capital. On March 3, 1865, the large union ships ran aground at Port Leon and could not make it to the Fort. About 900 Union troops, including the 2nd and 99th Regiments U.S. Colored Infantry, continued to advance on Tallahassee over land. The smaller Confederate troop was comprised of about 600 soldiers, including old men and cadets as young as 14 from the West Florida Seminary, now known as Florida State University. With a timely warning, these volunteer soldiers met the Union forces at Natural Bridge and after 10 hours, successfully repelled three major attacks. The battle ended on March 6, 1865 with the Union troops retreating.