



Study of Alternatives Newsletter

Proposed Interpretive Center in Montgomery, Alabama, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

History and Background

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (NHT) was established by Congress in 1996, to commemorate the events, people, and route of the 1965 Voting Rights March that was held in Alabama. This 54-mile trail winds its way from the streets of Selma, Alabama, through the gentle rolling hills of Lowndes County, and into the state's capitol city of Montgomery.

The first march began on March 7, 1965 at the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, however the march came to an end as marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge and were attacked by law enforcement officers. This event became known as "Bloody Sunday" due to the use of tear gas and billy clubs on the marchers. A second march went to the foot of the bridge where marchers prayed for the victims. The third march was held on March 21, 1965. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr led marchers, along with protestors from across the country, and state and federal law enforcement officials who provided protection for the marchers, on a five-day march from the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church to the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery.

The marchers traveled along Highway 80 in Dallas County, continued through Lowndes County and Montgomery County, and ended the five day trek at the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery. During the five day march, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee provided food, water, sanitation, and other services for marchers who camped out along the way.

A total of 25,000 marchers concluded the historic march to Montgomery on March 25, 1965. Many notable speakers addressed the crowd at a concluding rally near the capitol. As a result of this historic event, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act on May 26, 1965. This Act established the legal right to vote for all Americans and forever altered the regional and national political landscape. The Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March remains one of the most significant civil rights protests in American History.



The Selma to Montgomery March of 1965 remains one of the most significant civil rights protest in American History. The march helped establish the right to vote for all Americans.

Purpose and Mission of the Trail

The purpose of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail includes the:

- Commemoration of the events, people, and route of the march, as a reminder of the right and responsibility of all Americans to participate fully in the election process and the maintenance of vigilance in protecting the right to vote;
- The identification, preservation, and protection of the historic route, and resources that inform the public about the Voting Rights March of 1965;
- The interpretation and documentation of the story of the march; and
- The enhancement and development of partnerships between the NPS, state and local governments, as well as various citizen groups, to achieve the Trail's purpose.

It is the mission of the National Park Service to preserve and interpret the history of the sites associated with the 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama which resulted in the signing of the Voting Rights Act in August 6, 1965. The National Park Service works with the community to preserve America's treasures so that future generations may enjoy our heritage.



Alabama State Troopers gas protestors as they attempt to march to the state capitol.

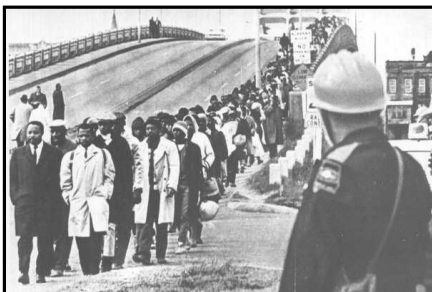
Experiencing the Trail

Visitors are encouraged to drive the historic route from Selma to Montgomery. In Selma, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Walking Tour includes visits to the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, the First Baptist Church, Carver Homes, and wayside exhibits. The Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River is the gateway of the Selma city limits. This bridge became symbolic of the first attempt to march to Montgomery and became the site of "Bloody Sunday." The Lowndes County Interpretive Center, located midway between Selma and Montgomery, opened in August 2006. The interpretive center was built on the site of Tent City; a temporary encampment that provided food, tents, cots, heaters, and water for many families that were thrown off their land for engaging in voting rights activities. The historic route continues past many of the original campsites where marchers stopped to rest, eat, and receive first aid. The trail ends in the city of Montgomery, where marchers continued from the City of St. Jude to the Alabama State Capitol. The City of St. Jude is a non-discriminatory, religious, health, and educational complex that offered 36 acres for the last encampment of the march.

Proposed Project

The National Park Service is working with the community to construct and develop a new interpretive center in the city of Montgomery. The center will provide education and appreciation of the story and associated resources of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail.

On December 6, 2007, the National Park Service held a public meeting to discuss the future development plans of the Montgomery Interpretive Center. The National Park Service is considering four sites for the proposed center. The center would be similar in design to the Lowndes County Interpretive Center.



Marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge.



The four sites/alternatives being considered for the Montgomery Interpretive Center.

Project Alternatives

The following are descriptions of the four sites/alternatives being considered for the Montgomery Interpretive Center to be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment:

Alabama State University (ASU) Site:

The ASU site is a 5-acre site that ASU will provide at no cost to the National Park Service. The site is located on the eastern side of the campus approximately one mile from Interstate 85. The site is not directly on the Selma to Montgomery NHT; however, many historical events took place on or near the ASU campus in the period leading up to and after the march.

Former Durr Drug Site:

The former Durr Drug site is a 5.8-acre site which includes several interconnected warehouse buildings. This site is located on the south side of West Fairview Avenue directly across the street from the City of St. Jude. The former Durr Drug is located on the Selma to Montgomery NHT and is near the historic Camp Site 4. The Durr Drug Building was built in the late 1950's and thus existed on the site during the march. Due to this historic connection, the Durr Drug building would be renovated and reused.

Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church:

The Mount Zion Site is located on a 1.8-acre site that the City of Montgomery will provide at no cost to the National Park Service. In addition the City of Montgomery will provide adjacent sites for the required parking areas. The site is bordered by South Holt Street to the west, Grady Street to the north, and Stone Street to the south. The site is on the Selma to Montgomery NHT and contains the Mount Zion Church, a building that was on the site during the march, and was the setting for several historic meetings related to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights history. The Mount Zion Church has been recently stabilized and is in the process of further improvements.

St. Jude Fairview Plaza:

The St. Jude Fairview Plaza site is a 10-acre site which includes a strip mall, vacant fast food restaurant, and a shed. The site is on the Selma to Montgomery NHT and was intricately associated with historic Camp Site 4. None of the existing buildings on the site were present during the march. Fairview Plaza is located on the north side of West Fairview Avenue and is bordered by Oak Street to the west and by Interstate I-65 to the east.

NEPA Process and Public Scoping Period



Library of Congress, 2005

The third and final march lasted five days. Marchers walked for 54 miles from the Edmund Pettus Bridge to the state capitol in Montgomery. The march concluded with a rally with many notable speakers including Dr. Martin Luther King.

NEPA Process

The National Park Service must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 to assure consideration of important environmental issues. The construction of an Interpretive Center in Montgomery will be analyzed during the NEPA process.

The environmental effects resulting from the proposed Interpretive Center will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment. The analysis will consider impacts to topics such as wildlife habitat, vegetation, rare/threatened/ endangered species, water resources, air quality, socioeconomics, cultural resources, soils, park visitor use and experience, and public health and safety.

The document will analyze both short-term, long-term, and cumulative effects of the proposed action alternatives, along with the “no action alternative.” By comparing the proposed action alternatives with the no action alternative, and identifying mitigation measures that would minimize adverse effects, this Environmental Assessment will assist stakeholders in the decision-making process.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The mission of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is to preserve and interpret the history of the sites associated with the 1965 Voting Rights March.

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Public Scoping Period

As part of the NEPA process, the proposed project will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment, which will analyze the potential environmental effects of the proposed alternatives. At this time, the Superintendent is announcing a 30-day public scoping period to solicit public comments on the proposed alternatives. During this period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed site locations so that the National Park Service can appropriately consider them in the Environmental Assessment. You may submit your comments electronically at the National Park Service's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>). If you are unable to access this website, please submit written comments to :

Superintendent
Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail
7002 US Highway 80
Haynesville, Alabama 36040

Please submit comments by April 8, 2009. Once the Environmental Assessment is developed, it will be made available for public review for a 30-day period. If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list, please be sure to indicate that in your response.

It is National Park Service practice to make all comments, including names and addresses of respondents who provide that information, available for public review. Individuals may request that the National Park Service withhold their name and/or address from public disclosure. If you wish to do this, correspondents using the website can make such a request by checking the box “keep my contact information private”. If submitting written comments please state this request at the beginning of your comment. The National Park Service will honor such requests to the extent allowable by law.



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