



Foundation Document Overview

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

Alabama



Contact Information

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Park Description



The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, in central Alabama, was established by Congress in 1996 to commemorate the routes, people, places, and events significantly linked to the Selma voting rights movement and the three voting rights marches that took place in 1965. The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is a component of the National Trails System and is administered by the National Park Service.

The 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches are recognized as a pivotal event among the campaigns for human rights in the United States. The voting rights marches include the first march that resulted in “Bloody Sunday” (March 7, 1965), the second march that is also known as “Turnaround Tuesday” (March 9, 1965), and the final Selma to Montgomery voting rights march (March 21– 25, 1965). Occurring at the height of the modern civil rights movement that gained momentum in the 1950s, the marches and the critical events associated with them brought voting rights issues to the forefront of the national political agenda. Bolstered by the landmark Civil Rights Act of the previous year, the voting rights marches and the Voting Rights Act that the marches engendered profoundly raised Americans’ consciousness about the struggle of African Americans for equal rights.

The 54-mile-long national historic trail begins at the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Selma and then follows the 1965 historic routes of the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches through the city and eastward along US Highway 80 through Dallas County and Lowndes County. Crossing into Montgomery County, the Trail continues into the city of Montgomery and ends at the Alabama State Capitol.

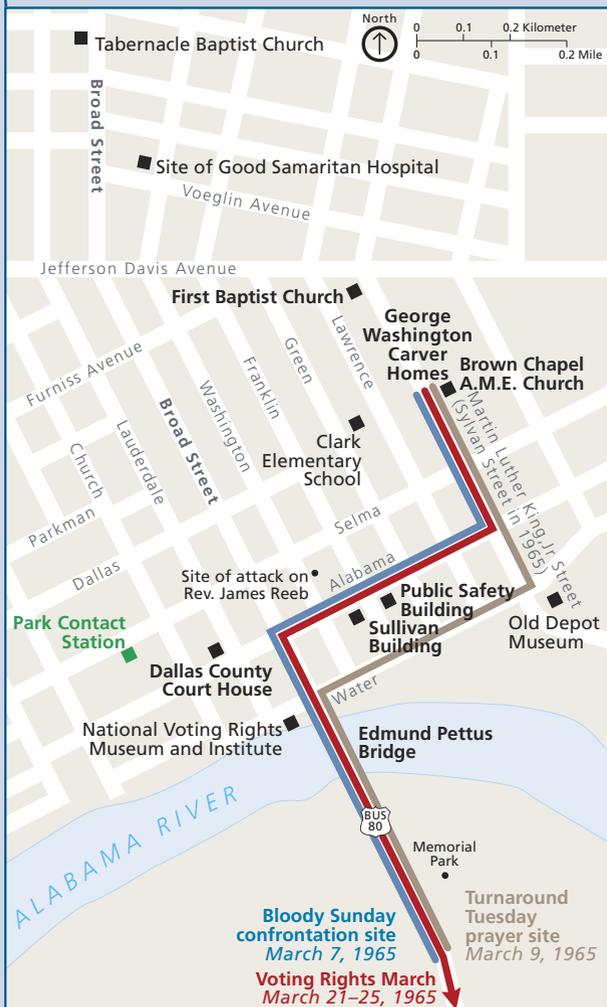
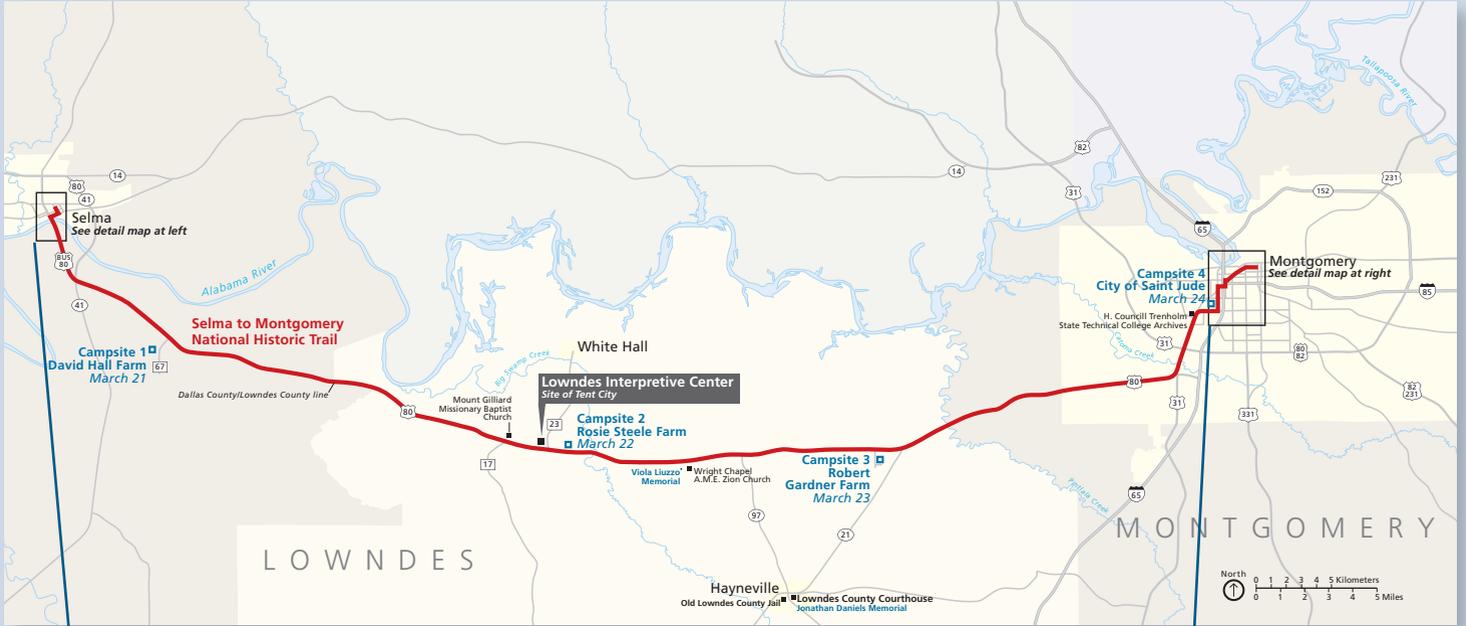


In many respects, the cultural landscape associated with the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail along the US Highway 80 corridor continues to reflect patterns of agrarian land use that existed from the time of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches. Despite some changes and development pressures, features that contribute to this landscape (e.g., row crop fields, pastures, woodlots) remain largely intact, enhancing the Trail’s historic setting, feeling, and cultural associations.

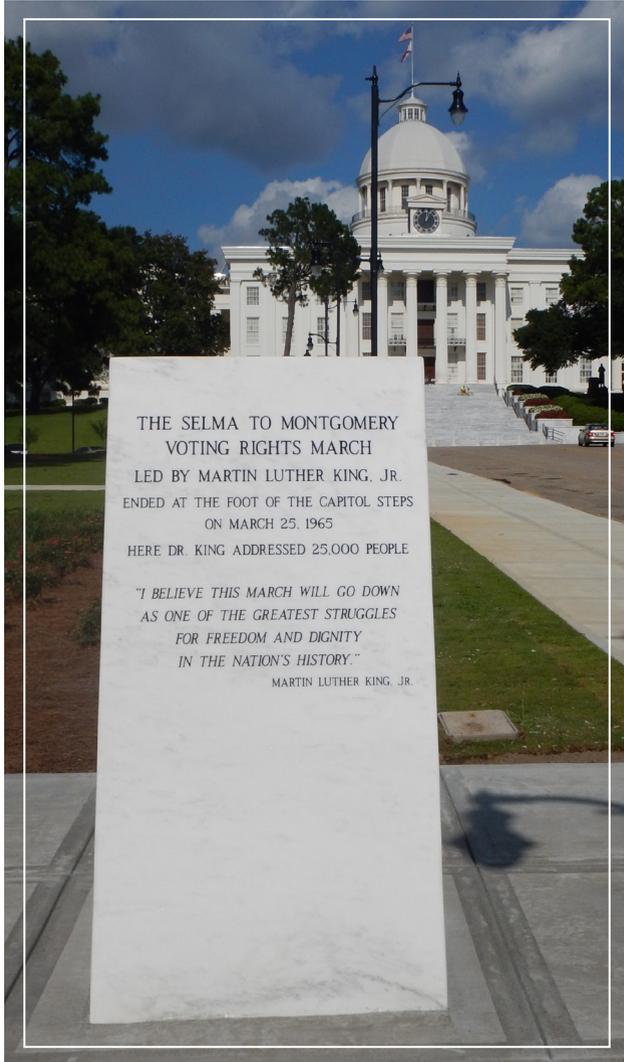
Several surviving historic buildings, structures, and sites are intimately associated with the national historic trail including the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma (the starting point for the voting rights marches and designated a national historic landmark in 1982); the First Baptist Church (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee headquarters during the Selma voting rights movement); the Edmund Pettus Bridge which includes the “Bloody Sunday” confrontation site (designated a national historic landmark in 2013); the Dallas County Court House (the destination for the majority of the marches during the Selma voting rights movement); “Tent City” in White Hall; four camp sites along the march route (notably the City of Saint Jude, a Catholic social services complex that was the site of the last encampment and the “Stars for Freedom” rally); the Alabama State Capitol; and the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery (staging area for the concluding rally).

Today, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail stands as an enduring testament to the long struggle and sacrifices made by many individuals to preserve the right to vote as a fundamental cornerstone of American democracy.

Trail Map



Purpose



Significance

Significance statements express why Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Media coverage of the violent confrontation between law enforcement officers and members of the civil rights movement on March 7, 1965, now known as “Bloody Sunday,” followed by the minister’s march on March 9, also called “Turnaround Tuesday,” and the final Selma to Montgomery voting rights march on March 21–25, 1965, brought the issue of voting rights to the forefront of national consciousness and through nonviolent protest won broad support for the cause of civil rights in America.



The SELMA TO MONTGOMERY NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL commemorates the events of the Selma voting rights movement, the people, the places, and the routes of the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches of 1965. Through partnerships and collaboration, the Trail interprets and preserves the important stories of the Selma voting rights movement, inspiring all citizens to be vigilant in protecting their constitutional rights.



Significance



- Undaunted by the events of “Bloody Sunday” and protected by a federal court order issued on March 17, 1965, as well as the US Army and members of the National Guard, courageous citizens, local leaders, and civil rights groups participated in the final Selma to Montgomery voting rights march affirming the constitutional rights to peacefully protest afforded to all Americans.
- The results of the Selma voting rights movement and Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches were an important catalyst in the passage of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965, which reinforced and protected the legal right to vote for qualified Americans, changing political life in the United States and throughout the South, especially in Alabama’s black belt.
- Covering 54 miles through Dallas, Lowndes, and Montgomery Counties in Alabama, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail works through partnerships to protect the many places and landscapes that provide opportunities for reflecting on and connecting to the events of the Selma voting rights movement.
- Although the civil rights movement was nonviolent, many suffered from the violent opposition to change and some were even murdered as a result of the struggle to affirm the right to vote. These deaths galvanized broad support before, during, and after the marches of the Selma voting rights movement in Alabama, and are commemorated along the Trail today.
- Following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, exercising the hard-fought right to cast a ballot often had consequences and hardships for African Americans. In Lowndes County many tenant farmers were evicted for exercising their right to vote leading to the creation of a tent city—temporary housing, where families lived and struggled together for more than two years.
- As one of the most pivotal civil rights protests in American history, the Selma voting rights movement in Alabama that resulted in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches not only changed the nation but served as both a model and inspiration for other nonviolent movements throughout the world.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

Story of the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights Marches

The stories of the events leading to, during, and resulting from the three Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches are fundamental to the national historic trail. The individuals and groups that organized, supported, and participated in these events and marches demonstrated unparalleled determination, valor, sacrifice, and hope. This grassroots campaign for human rights is considered to be a high point of the modern civil rights movement. The importance of this story is reflected in the fact that the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail was established only 30 years after these events. This timely designation was driven by the national significance of the Selma voting rights movement and by the strong voices of many of the individuals who witnessed and participated in these historic events. Those voices are just as powerful today, telling this important story and continuing to share its meaning with all.

Partnerships and Collaboration with Trail Partners and Local Communities

Collaborating with local community members and groups in commemorating, raising awareness, and preserving the history of the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches is essential to the Trail. Through partnerships with local churches, friends groups, universities, cities, counties, and the state of Alabama, the rich history and important lessons of the Selma voting rights movement are shared. In particular, these partnerships make connections between those who were directly involved in the march and the youth of today. These partnerships are essential to sharing the history and legacy of the march with the American people.

Commemorating the Important Sites Associated with the Selma Voting Rights Movement

The many historic places and landscapes associated with the marches are essential to commemorating and connecting visitors to the historic events of the three Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches. These places of reflection include sites along the route of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail as well as other sites associated with the voting rights struggle but not directly along the Trail. Some of the most recognized and iconic places include: the Edmund Pettus Bridge, US Highway 80, St. Jude Complex, Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, Alabama State Capitol, campsites, and Viola Liuzzo Memorial.

Historic sites, wayside signage, and markers provide an opportunity to interpret the very personal stories and experiences of those who participated in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches. Although the national historic trail does not manage or own any of these important sites, these places are essential to commemorating the events and people associated with the struggle for voting rights.



Fundamental Resources and Values



Objects in the Museum Collection

The museum collection consists of nearly 500 objects and artifacts associated with the historic events of the Selma voting rights movement and Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches. Many of these objects are remarkable because of their direct connection to individuals that participated in the Selma voting rights movement in Alabama, and their direct association with the historic events of the marches. The collection is largely composed of personal items donated to the national historic trail by march participants.

Between 2004 and early 2005, the National Park Service purchased all objects on display in the Lowndes Interpretative Center. Objects range from furniture and clothing to cameras and household items. Toys, books, a pew and a gas mask were also purchased. Additional civil rights memorabilia include a March 19, 1965, *Life* magazine featuring the voting rights march. These objects serve as a physical record of the history of the Selma voting rights movement and support interpretive programs and exhibits at the Selma and Lowndes County interpretive centers. Objects not on display are stored at the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site's Collection Management Center.

Oral Histories and Archives

The oral histories and archives are tangible links to the voices of the Selma voting rights movement. These archives contain approximately 100 items and largely consist of oral histories, manuscripts, and personal accounts from those who participated in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches. Media coverage, newspaper headlines, and photography were key tools used to raise national attention and support for the Selma voting rights movement and are an important part of these archives. The oral histories and archives are essential to preserving the voices of those who witnessed and participated in these historic events and to understanding the struggle for voting rights. These resources also support interpretive programs and exhibits at interpretive centers in Selma and Lowndes County.

Historic Site of Tent City

Portions of the historic site of Tent City in Lowndes County, Alabama, are situated within the boundary of the Lowndes Interpretive Center. The site represents the political and social retribution that local African Americans faced as a result of exercising their constitutional rights protected by the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. White landowners retaliated against hundreds of tenant farmers for registering, voting, or engaging in any civil rights activities, throwing them off the white landowners' lands as they exercised their constitutional rights. Tent City was developed to house displaced families, who lived on the site for more than two years. The site of Tent City is now used as public space with picnic tables and shelters, walking paths, interpretive displays, parking areas, and the interpretive center itself.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The events resulting in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches significantly influenced the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which empowered citizens previously denied the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act continues to change the political, economic, educational, and social fabric of American society.
- Although those opposing change tried to maintain the status quo through intimidation and violence, many more committed individuals, working together, fought against racism, fear, and hatred, often risking their lives and livelihoods to bring about vast change by ensuring the right to vote for present and future generations.
- The efforts of those individuals involved in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches are part of the long continuum within the civil and human rights struggle, a struggle that continues today.
- The historic places, cultural landscapes, and natural environments along the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail served as the backdrop for and provide a window into the social, economic, and legal systems that resulted in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches, images of which shaped the national reaction and response, and memory of the civil rights movement.
- Through the use of nonviolent protest during the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches, ordinary people worked to mobilize and sustain the modern civil rights movement, one of the most recognized and well organized nonviolent protests, that continues to serve as an example for other worldwide democratic movements.

