



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail



A progress report on the status of the Trail

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## On the Path

This past fall public television stations across the country broadcasted the newest Ken Burn's documentary "America's

Best Idea: The National Parks." Since then, interest in areas administered by the National Park Service has been on the rise, including the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

As you will read in this year's "Progress Report," the Trail received a sizeable grant from the National Park Foundation; that has brought more attention than ever before to the Trail resource and its story. By partnering with the Overmountain Victory Trail Association, we have used the funds to attract students and visitors to sites and sections of the Trail where they can learn about the past and enjoy a walk where Patriot militia once passed. That funded effort concludes June 5, 2010 with local community events on National Trails Day.

In addition, we are now fully involved in a study to determine the site of a headquarters for the Trail. The interest in the OVNHT route continues to grow; and such a facility would allow the NPS to add staff, who would be able to respond to the needs of the resource and visitors, while assisting with continued growth.

It is a busy and exciting time for us along the Trail. We hope you enjoy reading about the latest events; and, please consider joining us for activities throughout the coming year.

- Paul Carson, Superintendent

## A Great Foundation for a Better Trail

*National Park Foundation chooses the OVNHT to receive \$50,000 grant from Coca-Cola Foundation*

In 2009, the National Park Foundation selected the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail to receive a special \$50,000 grant funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation. The OVNHT is one of only eight units of the National Park Service to receive such a grant this year. Of the eight grantees, it is the only national historic or scenic trail.

"The National Park Foundation grant presented the Trail with a wonderful opportunity," said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent. "Teaming with our Trail partners and communities throughout the four states in which the OVNHT runs, we brought more people than ever before onto the Trail during the annual



Activities all along OVNHT were made possible during 2009 Reenactment by NPF's grant.

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## A Place to Call Home

*Continuing the feasibility study for the OVNHT Headquarters & Visitor Center*

This fall, the NPS completed Step 2 of its 11-step evaluation process by conducting an initial set of public meetings to gather input on potential site locations for a permanent OVNHT headquarters and visitor center.



continue through the evaluation process," said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent. "We had over 600 people attend our four public meetings. Many more people provided their comments through the website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ovvi>. We invite the public to continue providing us with their ideas as we identify alternative sites to be further evaluated."

"Public participation has been outstanding and we expect that to

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## A Top Shelf Effort

### Still Working to Protect Shelving Rock Encampment Site

In a special event sponsored by the Roan Mountain Citizen's Club and the OVTA, the community gathered under tents in a pouring rain to commemorate the encampment of the Overmountain Men at Shelving Rock and to encourage the protection and preservation of the site. The weather was a fitting tribute to the occasion; it rained 229 years ago as well.



Supporters are proud to have Shelving Rock Encampment listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. Across the Doe River, Shelving Rock (seen through the trees) is adjacent to TN 143.



Tom Burleson welcomed the crowd to the Shelving Rock Encampment and reminded attendees that the site was originally known as *The Resting Place*, the first flat spot with water for people to stop after coming over Roan Mountain into the Watauga Valley. "It remains today in the same condition it was when the

Overmountain Men camped there September 26, 1780," he said. Burleson is one of the property owners actively working to preserve the historic site through its sale to the State of Tennessee.

US Congressman Phil Rowe, whose ancestor fought in the Battle of Kings Mountain, said he was "personally driven to help preserve this site for future generations to share and appreciate the heritage captured in the story that is told here." Declaring that Shelving Rock was a "singularly significant place of honor in Tennessee," State Senator Rusty Crowe, representing Carter County, read a Senate Resolution supporting the state's effort to acquire the land and protect it as a site along the OVNHT. Both men serve on the veterans committees in their respective state and national chambers. Kent Williams, Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, also joined the event.



US Congressman Phil Rowe addresses the audience.



Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives Kent Williams (r) talks with OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson.



Tom Burleson (r) invites Tennessee Senator Rusty Crowe to speak as former state senator Bob Burleson (l) looks on.

All offered strong hopes that the state purchase might be made soon. East Tennessee State Parks Regional Manager Herb Roberts said, "This is hallowed ground. Except for what happened at Sycamore Shoals and at Shelving Rock, where the men prepared, what story would there be to tell?" He reminded the crowd that Tennessee has two significant campsites related to the historic campaign to Kings Mountain. "One is protected; one is not. This site is a part of American history."

OVTA members preformed a dramatic telling of The Story for the audience.

Funds are not yet committed and the site is still not protected. Individuals and organizations wanting to help preserve this site may contact the Overmountain Victory Trail Assn. at [www.OVTA.org](http://www.OVTA.org). ●

## Coming Home

### Wilkes-Surry OVTA expands the telling of the story

After the Battle of King's Mountain on October 7, 1780, the Patriot militiamen made their way back to their respective homes in the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, and over the mountains. One group returned along the Yadkin River guarding Loyalist prisoners destined for deposit at Bethabara two weeks later.

Helping expand the telling of the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780, the Wilkes-Surry Chapter of the OVTA hosted a special program for Elkin City Schools on October 9 as part of the Active Trails grant. The event took place at Elkin City Park, the eastern trailhead for the OVNHT. By tradition, the reenactment march has

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Students from Elkin City Schools walk along the OVNHT from the Yadkin River to Elkin City Park. Along the way they learned about the American Revolution and life in Surry County.

# Making the High Grade at Altapass

*Students walk the OVNHT along the Blue Ridge*

Storyteller and Orchard at Altapass proprietor Bill Carson greeted four bus-loads of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders from Mitchell County schools. They came to learn first-hand about American history in their part of the world. This program was sponsored by the Active Trails Grant.



**Bill Carson leads the students along the OVNHT as they depart The Orchard at Altapass.**

Leading the 160 students along a walkable stretch of the OVNHT, Carson sent a group of students ahead to scout for



**Students from Gouge, Buladean, and Dayton elementary schools walk along the trail with McKinney Gap in the background.**

possible militia who might be roaming the mountains. In short order the students came running back with a report of rifle fire ahead and a party of strangely-dressed men heading their way. Soon enough, reenactors from the OVTA greeted the walkers and lead them back to The Orchard. There the students divided into

groups and rotated among several stations where they met the reenactors and learned from them about different aspects of life on the 18<sup>th</sup> century frontier.

Several teachers remarked how helpful it was to get the students outside to connect them with the history where they live.



**Students learn how frontiersmen created artwork by carving on their powderhorns and darkening the pattern with bear grease and gunpowder.**

“Learning about the history of their community means so much more to them when they have a personal experience they can recall,” said one. ●

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ended on the date of the battle. “We all know the story continued,” said Teresa Howell, manager of Elkin’s Main Street Program. “We wanted to extend our telling of it as well.”

Students walked along more than two miles of Trail from the park and along the Yadkin River following in the historic footsteps made 229 years before. They visited educational



**Former US Senator James T. Broyhill addresses the students in Elkin telling them about the honors later bestowed on the heroes of the Battle of King’s Mountain.**

stations in blacksmithing, colonial music, candle making, backcountry cooking, and Native Americans among others. At lunch, they gathered for a talk by former US Senator James T. Broyhill, who shared with them the historic significance of the battle and challenged them to learn more about America’s revolutionary history.

Partner organizations supporting the OVNHT are growing in communities all along the Trail. Assisting in this growth are a number of new OVTA chapters organized and active in recent years. The quite active Wilkes-Surry Chapter was one of first regional chapters organized. ●



**Lessons in American Indian art, playing colonial games, and mustering as soldiers provided students with memorable learning about America’s history.**

## New Kiosk at the Mustering Ground

The National Park Service recently installed a new informational kiosk at The Mustering Ground, the northern trailhead of OVNHT.



**New informational kiosk in Abingdon, VA adds to community’s support of OVNHT.**

“This is a great addition to the interpretative resources provided in Abingdon, Virginia,” said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent. Current local plans include establishing a visitor center and interpretive museum at The Mustering Ground. ●



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

This is the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780 and how they helped win America's independence.

## Late September 1780

September 12, Burke County (NC) militiamen under the command of Charles McDowell skirmished with a part of Ferguson's Loyalist army at Cane Creek, then retreat over the Appalachian Mountains to Sycamore Shoals.

As a prisoner of war released by British Major Patrick Ferguson, Patriot militiaman Samuel Phillips delivers Ferguson's threatening message to Isaac Shelby in the overmountain regions of NC. Isaac Shelby rides 40 miles to the home of John Sevier to talk about the threat. The men agree to send messengers to call for a muster of militia at Sycamore Shoals (today's Elizabethton, TN).

**September 24** – Colonel William Campbell leaves The Mustering Ground (today's Abingdon, VA) for Sycamore Shoals. His 200 Virginia militiamen follow along the Watauga Road. Colonel Arthur Campbell leads another group of 200.

**September 25** – Four-hundred eighty militiamen from the Overmountain regions of North Carolina (today's Tennessee) muster at Sycamore Shoals with the militiamen from Virginia and 160 militiamen from Burke Co., NC.

**September 26** – The Overmountain Men ride toward the mountains driving a herd of cattle to feed their army; they camp at Shelving Rock, storing their powder beneath the rock ledge to keep it dry.

**September 27** – Overmountain Men "Cross the Roan" through the Yellow Mountain Gap after slaughtering beeves and preparing the meat. At the top of the mountain saddle, they parade in "snow shoe-mouth deep" and take roll. Two men with Tory leanings are discovered missing. The Overmountain Men camp along Roaring Creek. Meanwhile, in the northern piedmont of North Carolina, 350 Wilkes-Surry Patriot militia under the command of Major Joseph Winston and Colonel Benjamin Cleaveland ride upstream along the Yadkin River toward Quaker Meadows.

**September 28** – Overmountain Men move south along the North Toe River and camp where it joins Grassy Creek (near today's Spruce Pine).

**September 29** – Patriots divide into two groups near Gillespie Gap and descend the Blue Ridge Mountains following separate routes; they camp at Turkey Cove and North Cove.

**September 30** – The two groups of Overmountain Men ride along separate routes near the Catawba River and reunite along the way. They camp at Quaker Meadows where they are joined by the Wilkes-Surry militia and others. The spirit of the men is lifted as the band of Patriots grows in number.



The Mustering Ground, Abingdon, VA



Campbell G Seven Mile



Sycamore Shoals State Historic Site, Elizabethton, TN



Yellow Mountain Gap Road, Roan Mountain, TN



Museum of NC Minerals at Gillespie Gap, Spruce Pine, NC



Pisgah National Forest near Lake James, Marion, NC



Brittain Church Cemetery Rutherford Co., NC



Furnace Mill, Cherokee Co., SC





Grave Site, Ford, VA



OVNHT along Yadkin River, Elkin, NC



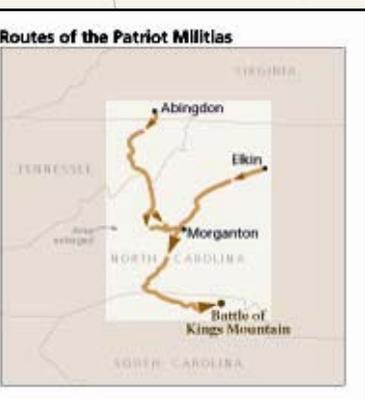
Yadkin River Greenway, North Wilkesboro, NC



W. Kerr Scott Dam & Reservoir, Wilkes Co, NC



Catawba River Greenway Morganton, NC



Kings Mountain National Military Park, York Co., SC

**October 1** – The combined army of over 1400 militiamen head south toward Gilbert Town (near today’s Rutherfordton) where they expect to find Ferguson’s army. Because of heavy rain, the Patriots stop in the late afternoon at Bedford Hill in South Mountain Gap.

**October 2** – Continuing rain keeps the men in camp this day. The Patriot leaders meet and elect William Campbell as their commander.

**October 3** – The Patriot militiamen prepare for battle and move toward Gilbert Town along Cane Creek. They do not pitch camp; the men sleep on their arms.

**October 4** – The Patriots arrive in Gilbert Town to find that Ferguson is already gone. The militia leaders send out scouts and continue south to learn if Ferguson is heading for the fort at Ninety-Six (SC) or for Charlotte (NC).

**October 5** – The Patriots head southwest and camp at Alexander’s Ford on the Green River. They learn from scouts that Ferguson is marching toward Charlotte and the protection of Cornwallis’s army.

**October 6** – The Patriots ride southeast toward Cowpens where they are joined by militiamen from South Carolina, Georgia and Lincoln Co., NC. They learn that Ferguson is only 35 miles away, camped at Kings Mountain. The leaders pick the 900 best marksmen and the 900 fastest horses. At 9:00 P.M. these Patriot militiamen ride into the night as a cold rain continues to fall.

**October 7** – Having ridden all night and forded the rain-swollen Broad River, the Patriot army encircles Kings Mountain at 3:00 pm and in “one heroic hour” captures or kills—including the despised Patrick Ferguson—the entire Loyalist Army. The Patriot losses are small: 28 killed and 62 wounded. The Loyalists suffer more: 150 killed, 150 wounded, some 800 captured. Cornwallis’s left flank is destroyed.

**Epilogue** – With this Patriot victory at Kings Mountain, the British found it harder to muster Loyalists. After subsequent battles at Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis decided he could not subdue North Carolina. He moved into Virginia; just 12 months and 12 days after the Battle of Kings Mountain, Cornwallis surrendered the British forces to the Continental Army under General George Washington, on Oct. 19, 1781 at Yorktown, VA. ●

### New OVNHT Brochure

During 2007, the NPS Harpers Ferry Center completed a new brochure for the Overmountain Victory NHT. It includes the detailed base map shown at left (completed in 2006), and interprets more history of the backcountry and piedmont patriots as well as the Southern Campaign. ●



## Strolling through History

*McDowell students engage the 18th century*

Joseph McDowell had company. At least his historic house, Pleasant Gardens in Marion, did. The certified site on the OVNHT welcomed 235 fourth-graders from Nebo, West Marion, and Glenwood elementary schools as part of the National Park Foundation's Active Trails grant to the OVNHT. The students and teachers spent the day immersed in the life of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.



**Elementary grade students rotate among educational stations**

Class by class the students rotated through 13 stations, playing colonial games, learning about salt making, blacksmithing, gunsmithing, spinning, colonial music, basketry, and firearms for hunting and defense.

“Our big thing is engaged learning,” said Ira Trollinger, Superintendent, McDowell County Schools. “I can’t think of a better way to engage our students about their local history and America’s history than letting them see and talk to these historical interpreters, especially on this historic trail.”



**Students take turns bayoneting apples on strings.**

“The grant was a real blessing for our children,” said Becky Pearson, Assistant

Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, “especially in a tight budget year. It made possible bringing the students out

here. I’ve been a classroom teacher and a principal; I know how much this experience means to the learning process.” Several teachers concurred. “This is an authentic, hands-on experience,” said Melissa Elliott. “This is so much better for their learning than any two-dimensional picture could ever be,” added Heather Hanes. “This is real to them,” said Monica Sigmon, “because it is history right here in our county. It’s part of their community; it’s part of their story.” Jessica Reel added, “Studying history helps our students find themselves in time. They begin to understand where they came from and how the actions of previous generations created the society we live in today.”



**Demonstrator Lorraine Voelker leads students in playing ring toss, a colonial game.**



**Students learn about 18th century cooking**

“Local funds from the National Park Foundation grant were given to the McDowell County Tourism Development Authority,” said Albert Dale, president of the McDowell County Historical Association. “That money was used to pay for the travel expenses of the colonial demonstrators and to pay the transportation costs of getting the students out here on the Trail.” ●

## A Solid Performance

*Evening program draws an eager crowd to Rocky Mount*



community on September 24. This event was planned as part of NPF's Active Trails grant. A large gathering from the community came to the site and onto the Trail. Through a candlelight tour of the William Cobb home, exhibits and videos in the museum, and a dramatization performed by OVTA, the

**OVTA reenactors rehearse for the program.**

Rocky Mount State Historic Site in Piney Flats, TN hosted a special evening program for the



**Performing for a community audience by the light of a campfire, OVTA reenactors dramatize the experience of militiamen on their way to Sycamore Shoals to muster with Shelby and Sevier on Sept. 25, 1780.**

attendees learned first-hand about the Overmountain Men of 1780 and their experiences at Rocky Mount. ●

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reenactment and told them the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780. And the efforts continue into 2010. This has been a banner year for the Trail; and, the success is due specifically to the effort and hard work of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association as the lead partner.”

The grant opportunity arose in the spring, and OVTA board member Marc Bowen crafted an application for the grant. The NP Foundation wanted to support efforts to get more people out and active in the national parks. The opportunities provided along the OVNHT matched very well with the Coca-Cola Foundation’s interest in sponsoring an “Active Trails” initiative to help entice local communities to get out and get people walking and hiking on nearby national historic and scenic trails. “I think they saw our interest in getting students onto the Trail to walk it and to learn about the significant history of the American Revolution that took place there as very much something they wanted to support,” said Alan Bowen, OVTA president.

During the annual reenactment in September/October, OVTA coordinated grant-funded programs in 13 communities including Bluff City, Elizabethton, and Roan Mountain, TN; Spruce Pine, Marion, Morgantown, Rutherfordton, Polk County, and Elkin, NC, and Cherokee County, SC. Other communities joined in the annual reenactment with special events as well including Abingdon, VA, Columbus, and Caldwell County, NC.

Over 11,000 students and adults came onto the Trail during the 2009 annual reenactment. “That is double the number we had just three years ago,” said, Mike Dahl, grant coordinator. “What we’ve been doing year after year continues to help grow interest in the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780.” ●

## The Muster that Mattered Most

*Tennessee students gather at Sycamore Shoals SHA*

“**M**arching in with the soldiers was really special,” said several students who came to Sycamore

Shoals State Historic Area on September 25. Students from Happy Valley School and South Central School joined the

frontier reenactors to commemorate the muster of overmountain men on that spot 229 years ago to the day. It was a lesson in history these students will long remember.

“We set up six stations for the students to visit. They learned about colonial foods and cooking; spinning, weaving, and dying fabrics of wool and linen; and long hunters with their frontier equipment including rifles,”



**Students muster at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area.** - photo, Jennifer Bauer

said Jennifer Bauer, Sycamore Shoals SHA Superintendent. “The funding from the Active Trails grant made it possible this year for the schools to get the students out to our site and on the Trail,” added Bauer, “where they connected with their Tennessee and American heritage.”

One group of OVTA marchers arrived at Sycamore Shoals after following the 1780 route of future-Tennessee-governor John Sevier and his 240 militiamen. They marched into Sycamore Shoals with students from South Central. “The students marched in carrying flags and formed up in a somewhat straight line—at least that was the plan,” Bauer said with a smile. “They looked proud.” ●

## Once Upon a Time

*An internship with ETSU strengthens the art of telling the story*

**A** graduate student in the storytelling program at East Tennessee State University will work as an OVNHT intern during 2009-2010. He will spend part of that time consulting with members of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association. He’ll spend other time under the direction of OVNHT Superintendent, Paul Carson.

“I will be helping the OVTA improve what they already do well,” said Christian Thompson, the intern. “I will help them enhance their capacity and capability to tell the story better and more effectively along the Trail, especially during the annual reenactment, but also during other times of the year as well.”

“This is another way to give OVNHT personal outreach beyond what we are able to do through volunteers such as members of OVTA,” said Paul Carson. “This internship expands our possibilities.” ●



**Standing beneath the Overmountain man monument at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area in Elizabethton, TN, OVTA member Steve Ricker (l) instructs intern Christian Thompson about the gear carried by 18th century militiamen.**

# Patriots for Partners

Trail partners are taking big steps together

Business consultants tell us that an organization is formed when a task is more than one person can do alone. That is certainly true when it comes to building the OVNHT. Today, dozens of organizations are working together across four states to build the commemorative Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT). In fact, today the Trail has well over 100 partners and more are joining every month! Here are some of them:

## Virginia

Numerous Private Landowners  
Virginia DOT  
Virginia Department of Tourism  
Virginia Department of Historical Resources  
Smyth County  
Town of Abingdon  
Washington County  
Historical Society of Washington County



## Tennessee

Numerous Private Landowners  
Tennessee DOT  
Town of Elizabethton  
Town of Bluff City  
Carter County  
Sullivan County  
Southern Appalachian Greenway Alliance  
Tennessee Department of Tourism  
Roan Mountain State Park  
Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area  
Rocky Mount State Historic Site  
Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area  
Cherokee National Forest – U.S.F.S  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy  
Appalachian National Scenic Trail—NPS  
Appalachian Trail Club  
Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee



## North Carolina

Numerous Private Landowners  
NCDOT  
NC Dept. of Cultural Resources  
NC Dept. of Tourism  
Pisgah National Forest – U.S. Forest Service  
Blue Ridge Parkway – NPS  
The Altapass Foundation  
McDowell County  
Wilkes County  
Brittain Church  
McDowell County Historical Society  
Historic Burke Foundation, Inc.  
Wilkes County Historical Society  
Surry County Historical Society  
Rutherford County Historical Society  
Lake James State Park  
Fort Defiance Historic Site  
Yadkin River Greenway  
Catawba River Greenway  
Duke Energy Company  
Crescent Land Corp.  
Wilkes County Heritage Museum  
Unimin Corporation  
Catawba-Wataree Relicensing Coalition  
Rutherford County  
Polk County  
City of Morganton  
City of Kings Mountain  
Town of Elkin  
Town of Rutherfordton  
Town of Ruth  
County of Burke  
Wake Forest University  
Piedmont Land Conservancy  
Foothills Land Conservancy  
Mountain to the Sea Trail  
Kings Mountain Gateway Committee  
Betchler Development Corporation  
Brushy Mountain Cyclists Club



W. Kerr Scott Reservoir – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Yadkin River Heritage Corridor  
Foothills Nature Science Society  
Blue Ridge National Heritage Area  
NC State University  
White Oak Development  
Overmountain Vineyards  
The Bradley Fund, LLC  
Conservation Trust for NC  
Avery County  
Mitchell County  
High Country Council of Governments  
Caldwell County  
Surry County  
North Carolina Horse Council

## South Carolina

Numerous Private Landowners  
SCDOT  
SC Department of Tourism  
Cowpens National Battlefield – NPS  
Kings Mountain NMP – NPS  
Kings Mountain State Park  
SC Department of Parks  
Overmountain Victory Trail Committee  
Cherokee County  
Spartanburg County  
Town of Gaffney  
Carolina Backcountry Alliance  
The Palmetto Conservation Foundation  
Colonial Pipeline Company  
Cherokee County Historical Society



## All States

Overmountain Victory Trail Association, Inc.  
Federal Highway Administration  
Daughters of the American Revolution  
Sons of the American Revolution  
American Hiking Society  
American Battlefield Protection Program  
Eastern National Monument Association  
National Park Foundation  
Student Conservation Association



For more information about being a Trail Partner, contact:

Paul Carson, Superintendent  
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail  
2635 Park Road  
Blacksburg, SC 29702

(864) 936-3477  
[www.NPS.gov/ovvi](http://www.NPS.gov/ovvi)



With so many interested parties working together on the OVNHT, we should not be surprised to see major elements of the Trail becoming a reality every year. It is indeed an exciting time to be involved with building the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. ●

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The planning process calls for the National Park Service to select in January 2010 a few “proposed sites” for further evaluation along with the “no action” alternative. In fall 2010, NPS will release the completed Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment. NPS will announce the preferred site in spring 2011. ●

Picture credits: All photography by Randell Jones except as noted.