

Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

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November 2004

Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway

Vision

To protect, enhance, and promote the scenic, natural, archaeological, historic, and recreational qualities of this region through preservation, improvement, and interpretation.



Red Oak Covered Bridge

This is the Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway. Preparation and submittal of this plan for state agency review is the next step in the state scenic byway designation process through the Georgia Department of Transportation.

The plan inventories and recognizes the six intrinsic qualities of the proposed byway and outlines an implementation strategy for achieving the locally determined vision for the byway. All of the jurisdictions along the scenic byway route have already passed resolutions of support for the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway.

State and National Scenic Byway Programs

The National Scenic Byway program offers communities an effective method to protect and promote their special scenic, historic, natural, cultural, recreational, and archaeological resources. Scenic byway designations are community-requested designations at the state or national level that recognize roads with these special features. This designation offers communities opportunities to highlight their most outstanding assets while attracting visitors in order to increase the economic benefits of tourism and recreation. Scenic byway designations encourage local citizens, businesses, community organizations, and government agencies to work together to protect the state's best roadways. A strong scenic byway program gives communities a tool to plan for future growth along the designated scenic byway corridor while

helping to safeguard against the loss of a road's beauty and intrinsic qualities to inappropriate development.

Local Background and Public Participation

In 2001, the Warm Springs Travel Association began exploring the designation of a state scenic byway as a way to promote the scenic beauty of Meriwether County and the legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Meetings were held with local leadership and with staff and consultants of Georgia DOT.

In 2002, after the route was approved by DOT, the Warm Springs Travel Association sponsored a series of public meetings in each of the communities along the byway - Gay, Manchester, the Cove, and Warm Springs.

The following entities have been involved in the planning of the byway route:

- City of Gay
- City of Woodbury
- City of Warm Springs
- City of Manchester
- Pike County
- City of Molena
- Meriwether County Board of Commissioners
- Rotary Club
- Warm Springs Area Tourism Association
- Warm Springs Downtown Development Authority
- Manchester Development Authority
- Meriwether County Chamber of Commerce
- Lower Chattahoochee RDC staff
- Pike County Board of Commissioners
- Congressman Phil Gingrey and staff

During the designation process, each local government along the byway adopted a resolution of support. During the corridor management planning process DOT board members and staff were sent information about the proposed route. In addition, 728 letters were mailed to property owners along the route. This mailing generated 73 phone calls for more information and three volunteers. Throughout the process, the Scenic Byway has received favorable media coverage in area and regional newspapers and on Columbus television stations.

Proposed Route

The Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway celebrates the unique legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in west Central Georgia. During the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, FDR came to Warm Springs in hopes that the therapeutic warm springs would help improve the

condition of his legs which were damaged by polio. Over the years, Franklin Delano Roosevelt invested financially and personally in the Meriwether County community. He built a home in Warm Springs (now operated as a state historic site) and spent many leisurely hours traveling throughout the county; picnicking and fishing at Flat Shoals, visiting the Cove (supposedly for its infamous bootleg whiskey), and merely driving through the countryside of the southeastern corner of the county.

The Scenic Byway retraces some of FDR's favorite routes through Meriwether County; many of which have changed very little in the past 70 years.

Travelers can pick up the route at any point throughout the 55-mile loop; however, the logical departure point is the Warm Springs Welcome Center, a re-creation of the depot where FDR would arrive into Warm Springs.

Travelers can then head up GA 85 towards Gay taking a slight detour onto Covered Bridge Road, where they can see Red Oak Covered Bridge, one of the few remaining Town Lattice bridges constructed by noted bridge-builder and freed slave Horace King.

From Red Oak Creek, travelers head north on GA 85 towards the town of Gay, a town that grew up around the railroad and the shipping of cotton from nearby farms. Gay is home to a number of major events each year. In May and October, the Cotton Pickin' Fair and the Great Gay Marketplace bring thousands from around the southeast.

From Gay, travelers head West on Massengale Mill Road, past Oakland Baptist Church, to Jones Mill, where a large grist mill and mill pond (at Red Oak Creek) are the only reminders of the once-thriving farm community.



Jones Mill, Gay, GA

Travelers can then loop back to Gay along GA 109 Spur, and then head east out of

Gay along Flat Shoals Road. Late 19th and early 20th century residential architecture lines the road within the Gay city limits, giving way to large acres of farmland dotted with an occasional tenant house or outbuilding that serve as reminders of the importance of agriculture in the county's history.

Right before the Pike County line, the road crosses the Flint River at Flat Shoals. The current bridge was built in 1955, but inhabitants of the area have been crossing at Flat Shoals for hundreds of years. The Flint River is broad and slow-moving at this point, and the large, flat rock outcroppings make a natural foot bridge. In fact, Flat Shoals is part of the Oakfuskee Trail, a major trade route of the Creek Indians.

From Flat Shoals, travelers head back west on GA 18 to the Pike County town of Molena, an early 20th century town of red brick storefronts and an old wooden calaboose (jail).



Downtown Molena

From Molena, travelers again cross the Flint River and take Cove Road into the Cove. While most of the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway route is characterized by rolling hills and straight roads, the Cove Road is full of steep hills and tight turns.

From the Cove, GA 85 takes travelers south of Woodbury towards Manchester with a stop at Flint Farms, an early 20th century farm atop Betts Mountain, which over the years has produced everything from peaches to cattle to red deer.

GA 85 continues south into Manchester, an early 20th century town built around the railroad and the textile industry. Designated a Better Hometown by the state of Georgia in 1997, Manchester continues to thrive with a bustling downtown and an active rail line. A special train-watching platform that doubles as a municipal pavilion was constructed several years ago to encourage train-watchers. Each October the city hosts Railroad Days which attracts railroad enthusiasts from all over the country.

From Manchester, GA 190 leads back to Warm Springs along the Pine Mountain Ridge, the southernmost extension of the Appalachian Trail.

Byway Oversight

To realize the community vision for the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway, the local governments will create a local entity to provide the necessary focus for the preservation and enhancement of the byway. While elected official involvement is paramount to our success, a Byway Commission will give the byway a more distinct community identity. The organizational structure for byway oversight is described further in the Implementation Strategy section of this Corridor Management Plan.

Current Conditions

State Route 85, State Route 109, and State Route 190 fall under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Department of Transportation. However, the Georgia DOT assumes no legal or financial responsibility as a result of the designation of the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway. In addition, the Georgia DOT is not obligated to perform a higher level of maintenance along the Scenic Byway route.

The current State Transportation Improvement Plan includes a number of road improvement projects along GA 85 that could impact the scenic byway. The Scenic Byway Commission intends to coordinate with the staff of Georgia DOT to ensure that the improvement projects are consistent with the goals of the scenic byway. According to Georgia DOT staff, there are currently no state route road system deficiencies along the Scenic Byway route.

According to current and future land use maps for Meriwether, Pike, and Talbot Counties, the land use along the byway is primarily residential, with limited commercial uses, typically in the historic downtown areas of Warm Springs, Gay, Molena, and Manchester.

DOT rules require that corridor management plans provide for segmentation - the exclusion of sections of commercial and industrial development or sections that do not possess the intrinsic qualities upon which scenic byway designation is based. However, the Meriwether-Pike County Scenic Byway route possesses high levels of all the intrinsic qualities, and no segmentation issues should be present.

Natural Quality

The Flint River and its tributaries form an important part of the Meriwether-Pike Scenic Byway. As part of one of the state's major river systems, the Flint River through Meriwether County ranges from being wide and slow-moving to a fast-flowing current with shoals and rock outcroppings. Red Oak Creek, which flows into the Flint, makes appearances along the Scenic Byway at the Red Oak Creek Covered

Bridge and at Jones Mill, where the creek becomes a large, still mill pond.

The Cove is an area defined by a unique geological formation, a circular stretch of the Pine Mountain ridge. Scientists believe that at one time the area was a dome, slowly eroded over time until all that remained was a fertile basin surrounded by quartzite. In an area of the state characterized by rolling hills, elevations in The Cove range from about 1000 to 1250 feet, and much of the basin land was cleared by the Native Americans for farming corn.

Scenic Quality

The rolling topography, lush vegetation, and large number of well-maintained historic resources throughout the county lend to the scenic quality of the route. There are very few visual intrusions along the route. Much of the area remains undeveloped, with acres still in agricultural use. Much of the farmland appears as it was 50 years ago, with carefully tended peach orchards and rolling hills.

The stretch of Highway 190 along the Pine Mountain ridge between Manchester and Warm Springs is part of the southernmost reach of the Appalachian Mountains. This area is known for its beautiful views.

In addition, the various crossings of the Flint River and its tributaries showcase the unspoiled beauty of one of Georgia's most significant rivers.

Historic Quality

There are historic resources all along the scenic byway route, presenting evidence of the way the region developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Good examples include largely unaltered downtown Gay, a fine example of a turn-of-the-century cotton trading town, and the various reminders of our agricultural heritage, i.e. barns and farmhouses that dot the landscape throughout the route.

Warm Springs is home to the Little White House, where Franklin Delano Roosevelt stayed while he received therapy in the warm springs that are located at what is now the Roosevelt Institute for Rehabilitation. The Little White House is now operated as a historic site by the state of Georgia. The Roosevelt Institute is also state-owned and portions of the facility are open to the public for tours on a regular basis.

During the late 1800's, Warm Springs, Georgia was a small summer resort for people seeking relief from sultry cities and air adulterated with smoke from multiplying chimneys of the new industrial age. On the site of a post tavern on a military highway leading to Columbus, the Meriwether Inn did a thriving seasonal business. A large, rambling building with gingerbread on its roofline; gables galore; curlicues in woodwork to shame an old-fashion penman; and contours unclassifiable in architecture, the Inn welcomed two generations of guests who arrived by stagecoach from the railroad depot at Durand, Georgia. The nearest village was Bullochville, which took the name of Warm Springs in 1924.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt first came to Warm Springs in the 1920s. He had heard of the curative powers of the waters at Warm Springs. At the time, FDR stayed at the Meriwether Inn and swam in the public swimming pool that was filled with the water of the springs. Over the next few years, he developed the first modern treatment center for infantile paralysis, which is known today as the Roosevelt Institute for Rehabilitation. With FDR's backing, new buildings designed by architect Henry Toombs were constructed and indoor treatment pools were built. Many of these facilities are still in use today.

In 1932, Henry Toombs also designed a house for President Roosevelt to stay in while visiting Warm Springs. This became known as the Little White House. FDR was at the Little White House at the time of his death. This house was opened to the public in the 1940s and is now the centerpiece of the Little White House State Historic Site which is operated by Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Currently, the Little White House site includes the Little White House, the Flag Walk and State Stones (flags and native stones from each state), and a new museum facility, which was built in 2004 in order to better present FDR's legacy and allow visitors and researchers greater access to the wealth of information stored on the grounds.

Just north of the city of Warm Springs is a fascinating remnant of FDR's influence in the area, the Eleanor Roosevelt School. Built in 1936-7 with financial assistance for the Julius Rosenwald Fund, this school was actually the last school built with money from the Rosenwald Fund. The Rosenwald Fund helped to build rural schools around the country in the early part of the 20th century, but by the early 1930s the fund had ceased to function. However, FDR remembered a promise he had been made in the 1920s after one of his first visits to Warm Springs and convinced the Rosenwald Fund to honor that promise. The Eleanor Roosevelt School now bears the distinction of being the last school funded by the Rosenwald Fund. The building is currently under private ownership, but the Meriwether County Board of Commissioners is exploring options to purchase and renovate the building for use as a community history museum.

The Red Oak Covered bridge outside of Gay is one of the last remaining wooden covered bridges built by Horace King, a freed slave who designed and built a number of Town lattice design covered bridges in west Georgia and east Alabama. It is also the longest span of wooden bridge in Georgia. Red Oak Creek Covered Bridge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.



Red Oak Covered Bridge

Founded in 1829, the town of Gay grew slowly, and in 1882 William F. Gay, grandson of founder William Sasser, opened the first store and post office in town (this building is still standing).



Downtown Gay

In 1907, the railroad came to town bringing great changes. Warehouses and stores were built as cotton was shipped from Gay. Agricultural products, cotton and peaches, remained strong in Gay until the mid-20th century.

The Oakland Baptist Church (circa 1899), located just off GA 85 on Massengale Mill Road, is one of the few remaining buildings from the Oakland community, near Gay. In the late 19th century, Oakland had five stores, a cotton gin, and a school. However, when the railroad came to Gay, Gay assumed the role of business center.



Oakland Baptist Church

There has been a mill at Jones Mill on Red Oak Creek since 1828 when John Jones established a grist mill. The current dam was built in 1950 and the building dates from the early 20th century. For many years, the Jones Mill area was the hub for the local farming community.

Roosevelt's legacy in the region also extends to Flat Shoals, a beautiful section on the Flint River near the Meriwether and Pike County lines. FDR used to travel with friends to Flat Shoals for picnics and other leisure-time activities.



The Flint River at Flat Shoals

The Cove area was settled over 200 years ago by Native Americans who farmed the fertile basin. As the county began to be settled in the 1830s, new residents were drawn to the area for its farming potential. Over the years, the area also developed another industry...moonshining. For years, bootleggers took advantage of the fertile land and isolated location to produce the area's biggest cash crop.

The city of Manchester was founded in 1909 when the Atlanta Birmingham Atlantic