

# Heritage trails to link Georgia's historic Civil War sites

—by Steven W. Longcrier and Alex Wiley

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*“All through this pine country there are better farms than we expected, and large stores of corn, fodder, and [sweet] potatoes....”*  
*[Major Henry Hitchcock, a member of Sherman's staff during the March to the Sea]*

## During the Civil War

Atlanta quickly developed into a leading industrial city in the South. Vital railroad lifelines supplied the Confederate Army with necessary goods and provisions. The city's warehouses stored war materials; numerous factories churned out essential items such as cannon, rifles, saddles, and rail cars. Atlanta was also home to important military hospitals.

No surprise then that from the fall of 1863 through the spring and summer of 1864, the Union Army's chief objective was to capture Atlanta. President Abraham Lincoln was fully aware that his re-election in November 1864 hinged upon the military success of the campaign to seize the city. Major General William T. Sherman's military success ultimately assured Lincoln's re-election and set in motion the collapse of the Confederacy.

More than a century later, the Atlanta Campaign and Sherman's famous 250-mile March to the Sea will soon lead visitors on an experience back in time. These historic trails follow the opposing armies' route from northwest Georgia near Chattanooga to Atlanta, and then both wings of Sherman's "march to the sea" from Atlanta to Savannah (Sherman divided his army into two forces —marching along almost parallel routes about 20-40 miles apart).

All told, six driving routes are being planned, with interpretive markers along the way to provide information on what happened at each location of Sherman's March. The other four are the Jefferson Davis Heritage Trail, Wilson's Raid Heritage Trail, Northeast Georgia Heritage Trail, and South Georgia Heritage Trail.

The Jefferson Davis Heritage Trail, for example, follows the route and capture of the Confederate president from Hester's Ferry on the Savannah River east of Athens to the capture site at Irwinville near Tifton in south Georgia, and the route to Macon from where he was sent to prison.

The historic trails will raise public awareness about existing historic preservation activities and will have numerous scenic, environmental, and economic benefits. In some rural areas the exact same dirt roads the soldiers marched on will be used—no telephone wires,





few mailboxes, no interstate highways nearby. The Atlanta Campaign, the March to the Sea, and the Jefferson Davis Heritage Trails will direct visitors from major cities through mostly rural counties where the economic benefits are most needed.

### Bringing the trails to life

A Georgia nonprofit corporation—Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails, Inc.—was established to bring the trails to life. The estimated budget for the six trails is \$4.3 million; about \$500,000 has been spent to date. About \$1 million in federal grants have been obtained in the form of transportation enhancement funds that are being administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). Local communities have also chipped in more than \$300,000—which includes donations from local government

and organizations situated in communities along the trails—and a similar amount was obtained from state and numerous private donors. In fact, as part of federal grant requirements, local communities must pay at least 20 percent of the total. The grant sponsor for the Atlanta Campaign and the March to the Sea Heritage Trails is Whitfield County; the City of Fitzgerald is sponsoring the Jefferson Davis Heritage Trail.

Nothing of this magnitude has ever been attempted before in Georgia. More than 100 local jurisdictions are involved thus far, along with GDOT, the Tourism Division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Other stakeholders include the U.S. National Park Service, Chamber of Commerce representatives, visitors' bureaus, and centers (e.g., Atlanta Convention and Visitors' Bureau, Cartersville-Bartow County Convention and Visitors' Bureau, and Chickamauga Battlefield Visitor Center), as well as historical societies, and college professors.

### Key tasks

MACTEC, Inc., an environmental, engineering, and construction management company, was retained to provide various services, including land survey, preparation of construction plans, and construction administration for placing 116 historic interpretive markers in 45 Georgia counties. The firm is also working closely with GDOT, local jurisdictions, and landowners to create public parking areas or to relocate markers to a historic site with public parking. In order to facilitate the drive from one interpretive marker to another, it's proposed to map 800 trailblazer signs from northwest Georgia to Savannah for the Atlanta Campaign and the March to the Sea Heritage Trails, and 200 for the Jefferson Davis Heritage Trail.

Each interpretive marker requires developing a right-of-way and a construction plan. In some places, this includes making a location drawing and a sketch to show the actual location for the sign placement. In other areas, more extensive/comprehensive easement drawings are required for the placement of interpretive markers, access to them, and for parking, besides a location map. On some sites, parking pull-offs are being designed—these include grading, drainage and paving, in addition to easements and location information.

The markers to be used will follow an exact design that the U.S. National Park Service currently uses. Each marker will be publicly accessible, and every local jurisdiction will be consulted on the visuals and verbiage that will be used.



### Taking to the trails

The first three historic trails are expected to be opened to the public in 2009. Civil War buffs, school children, and visitors will find much to explore and to admire on these trails. They'll see places where history was made and learn about the pivotal role Georgia and her citizens played in a war that shaped America's greatness. Here are some of the must-see sites along those trails.

#### Atlanta Campaign Heritage Trail

**Davis's Cross Roads:** Advancing east through mountain passes, Union Major General James S. Negley's division of the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps escaped a potentially crushing defeat here when Confederate units three times their number failed to properly coordinate an attack from September 9-11, 1863, approximately ten days prior to the Battle of Chickamauga.

**Dug Gap Battle Park:** As a feint to help hold General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army at Dalton, a federal division aggressively attacked and then withdrew from Dalton on May 8, 1864. Meanwhile the Federal Army of Tennessee flanked Dalton by secretly moving south toward Snake Creek Gap.

**Battle of Atlanta:** This portion of Confederate General John B. Hood's second major attack in three days, on July 22, 1864, is dramatically represented on the Cyclorama painting in Grant Park. This attack resulted in heavy losses and Confederate defeat.

#### March to the Sea Heritage Trail

##### Left Wing

**Statehouse Square:** Georgia's capitol grounds from 1807-1868, and now home to Georgia Military College, were damaged from the explosion of the state magazine in November 1864. The gothic-styled former Capitol building was recently renovated and now houses a museum.

**Fort Jackson:** Construction began in 1808 and continued to 1861, at which time it was seized by Georgia troops and additional equipment was installed. The fort was

used as Confederate headquarters for Savannah River batteries until captured by Sherman's army in December 1864.

##### Right Wing

**Ocmulgee River:** From November 18-20, 1864, the entire Union Army's right wing and cavalry—33,000 men—crossed the Ocmulgee River on pontoon bridges at Seven Islands. Planters Factory was also burned—it had been making cotton cloth for the Confederacy.

**Millen Station:** Founded in 1835 as an important railroad junction, Millen was entered by some 12,000 Federal soldiers of the 17th Corps on December 2, 1864. They burned the old depot, hotel and warehouses, then camped that night in this area.

#### Jefferson Davis Heritage Trail

**Ball's Ferry:** Arriving late on May 6, 1865, the Davis party stopped here near the east bank of the Oconee River to camp. But learning of a possible threat to his family located just to the south, Davis decided to ride all night on this unfamiliar river road.

**Irwinville:** During the evening of May 9, 1865, Davis sent members of his party to Irwinville in order to gather supplies and information. Then about 1:00 a.m. on May 10, troops of the 4th Michigan arrived. Posing as Confederates, they were told the Davis party and wagons were encamped about one-and-half miles north. Guided by a local slave, the Federal cavalry surrounded the camp about 4:00 a.m., then waited for daybreak.

Macon City Hall



*Editor's note: All interested in Georgia's Civil War history can also refer to Richard J. Lenz's book, *The Civil War in Georgia: An Illustrated Guide*, and website, [http://www.sherpa-guides.com/georgia/civil\\_war/](http://www.sherpa-guides.com/georgia/civil_war/). The web site features more than 220 Civil War sites, with hundreds of lesser-known Civil War places of interest. More than 200 original color photos by Robb Helffrick and 20 historic prints illustrate Lenz's book.*