

Whitfield County, Georgia
Historic Preservation Commission
January 19, 2006

Historic Property Designation Report

Whitfield County proposes local historic designation of a district to be known as the Rocky Face Ridge Battlefield Historic District, consisting of two sections, the Stewart Section, and the Cheatham-Stevenson Section. The sole reason for two sections is that the County wishes to designate only land it owns, and the major areas owned are not contiguous. They share a history, however, and will be treated as a unit for purposes of establishing significance.

Name of Property:

Historic names: Rocky Face Ridge, Buzzard Roost, Buzzard's Roost

Other names: Rocky Face Ridge (Current name)

Classification:

Ownership: Public-local (Whitfield County)

Category of Property: District

Number of resources within property: Three identified archaeological sites (9Wd102, 9Wd103, 9Wd146), but the entire area constitutes a portion of a more extensive battlefield.

National Register listing: None.

Function or Use:

Historic Function: Agriculture/Subsistence (crops and forestry)

This area was a battlefield during the Atlanta Campaign of the War Between the States.

Current Function: Recreation and Culture (hiking area)

Owner of Property:

Whitfield County, GA

Narrative Description:

Architectural Classification: Military fortifications. The proposed district is characterized by a number of types of military structures, including stone breastworks, earthen trenches, gun emplacements, rifle pits, gun emplacements, and other structures.

The Stewart Section: South End of Rocky Face Ridge north of Mill Creek, Stewart's Division: Baker, Stovall, and Clayton's Brigades. (Probable Confederate positions. Within the boundaries of State Archaeological Site 9WD146)

Surviving evidences of the War include an area of linear earthen steps that may be tent pads. The area is mostly wooded, with a few dirt roads cut in.

This section's southwestern boundary is contiguous to the right-of-way of I-75. The land is steep and wooded, and in mixed pine and hardwood.

The Cheatham-Stevenson Section: The Crest and some of the western flank of Rocky Face Ridge north of Mill Creek, continuing as far as the point at which Stephenson's line begins the descent into Crow Valley. Cheatham's Division, Carter's Brigade on the Crest; Stephenson's Division, Brown and Pettus' Brigades on the crest with Sweet's Alabama, Goldwater's Alabama, and Key's Arkansas Batteries (Confederate positions. Encompasses much of State Archaeological Site 9Wd103); and the Crest and much of the western flank of Rocky Face Ridge north of Mill Creek, beginning at the point at which Stephenson's line begins the descent into Crow Valley, and extending northward (Federal positions. Encompasses State Archaeological Site 9Wd102).

Confederate positions guarding Mill Creek Gap and Mill Creek Valley consist of stone breastworks at the military crest on the west side of the ridge, interspersed with natural rock outcroppings, and formed the Confederate defensive lines. Near the north end of the ridge, a line of stone breastworks descends toward Crow Valley, changing from stone to earthen about halfway down. Two stone-walled gun positions are on the crest of the ridge, and a four gun earthen battery is on the spur. Federal positions on the north end of the ridge were defended by hastily constructed breastworks. There exists a possible gun position and a road trace.

The land is steep and wooded, and in mixed pine and hardwood. Much of this section's western boundary is contiguous to the right-of-way of I-75.

Statement of Significance/Historical Development

Significant Dates: November 1863 to mid-May 1864. The opening phase of the Atlanta Campaign was waged here.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The areas proposed for local historic district designation are of military significance as portions of

a battlefield in the opening phase of the Atlanta Campaign. They are significant for architecture, and military engineering, preserving good examples of stone breastworks, earthen trenches, gun emplacements, rifle pits, and other structures. The battlefield here is also significant for politics/government, due to the Civil War's impact on American national history.

Dalton, approximately thirty miles southeast of Chattanooga, lies to the east of Rocky Face Ridge, a long north-south formation deriving its name from the rock cliffs on its west face. The Ridge, always a visible presence, effectively screened Dalton from approach from the northwest, where Federal troops were preparing to advance following the Battle of Missionary Ridge. Rocky Face was pierced by only two passes, Mill Creek Gap and Dug Gap. The primary route between Chattanooga and Dalton was through Mill Creek Gap, just northwest of town, a deep defile through which ran Mill Creek and both the railroad and the wagon road to Chattanooga. Also known as "Buzzards Roost," Mill Creek Gap was guarded by steep, rocky cliffs on both sides. To the west of Rocky Face Ridge lay Mill Creek Valley.

About three and a half miles to the south, Dug Gap, so named from excavations that made it passable, accommodated a narrow, steep dirt track. The only other approach to Dalton was around the north end of Rocky Face, where Harris Gap led between Rocky Face and Cohutta Ridge to its north into Crow Valley, which extended southwards towards Dalton. The eastern edge of Crow Valley was marked by an unnamed line of low ridges, beyond which Hamilton Mountain rose to the east. Immediately to the south of Hamilton Mountain, Mount Rachel looked over the junction of the Western & Atlantic Railroad which led northeast from Atlanta to Chattanooga, and the East Tennessee Railroad, which branched northward to Cleveland, Tennessee, roughly parallel to the Cleveland Road. To a great extent, Dalton's topography shaped the events that took place there.

When news of the Confederate route at Missionary Ridge in November of 1863 reached Dalton, many residents began to prepare for evacuation. The Union Army had penetrated deep into Confederate territory, and General Grant (USA) was preparing to continue the advance. Dalton was of particular value to the invaders, since Mill Creek Gap afforded passage from Grant's position in Chattanooga into the interior of the State of Georgia, and the Western & Atlantic Railroad line, which passed through the Gap and into the City, would transport supplies to whichever side in the contest controlled it, and led to Atlanta, an important strategic position deep in the heart of the Confederacy.

After Missionary Ridge, the Army of Tennessee (CSA) retreated to Dalton, and occupied the City. There, General Bragg requested President Davis to be relieved of his duties. He relinquished command in early December of 1863, and his temporary replacement, General Hardee, remained until succeeded by General Johnston late in the same month. Upon assuming command, Johnston immediately set about re-equipping the troops and improving their morale. He took advantage of the ridges near Dalton, and fortified them to defend from attacks from the west and north.

General Grant sent General Sherman to attack Johnston's Army of Tennessee in North Georgia, and to penetrate as far into the interior of the State as possible. On May 4, 1864, Sherman ordered his armies into position, and by May 7, his forces had begun to move against Johnston, whose troops took up defensive positions on Rocky Face Ridge and in Crow Valley.

Sherman concentrated on logistics, since the fortified cliffs made the Gap virtually impregnable, and Johnston's men had dammed Mill Creek, flooding the Gap and rendering it impassable. Sherman ordered McPherson's Army of the Tennessee to proceed south through Mill Creek Valley to Snake Creek Gap to sever the railroad line at Resaca, just south of Dalton, and to Johnston's rear. To distract Johnston, General Thomas's Army of the Cumberland moved against Tunnel Hill to the west of Rocky Face, while General Schofield approached Dalton from the north.

On May 8, Union forces seized Blue Mountain and established a signal tower on its summit just northwest of Rocky Face Ridge, and with a commanding view of the Ridge and the Gap. Howard's IV Corps began the ascent of the unfortified northern tip of Rocky Face, and moved southward along the narrow crest toward the fortified Confederate positions, while Schofield's Army of the Ohio advanced against Confederate positions in Crow Valley. That afternoon, General Geary's Division in Mill Creek Valley launched an unsuccessful assault on Confederate positions at Dug Gap, and Union troops tried further unsuccessful probes over the course of the next two days.

On May 9, Federal forces reached the crest of the north end of Rocky Face Ridge and advanced southward, but were defeated, with considerable casualties on both sides, when they encountered Stevenson's (CSA) line at the point where it began its descent across the face of the ridge into Crow Valley.

Skirmishing continued as Sherman probed the Confederate line without success. Convinced that he could not penetrate Rocky Face's defences, Sherman turned his army south through Mill Creek Valley, to join McPherson at Snake Creek Gap, leaving a small contingent behind to distract the Confederates from his move.

On May 12, upon discovering that Sherman was directing most of his forces south to Resaca, to Johnston's rear, Johnston withdrew from Rocky Face Ridge and Dalton to deploy in previously prepared positions near Resaca. By daybreak on the 13th, Confederate troops had completely withdrawn, and Sherman's troops who had remained at Mill Creek Gap occupied Dalton, which by then had been vacated by its panicked residents.

Specific military activity in the Stewart Section of the District: Gen. Alexander P. Stewart caused the construction of the fortifications at Mill Creek Gap, as stated in his Report of June 5, 1864: "In fortifying the gap, I had caused lines of breast-heights for skirmishers to be constructed in front of the main lines of battle, artillery proof. (T)he defenses of the gap were constructed by my division, Lieut. John W. Glenn being the engineer officer superintending.... Capt. John A. Averitt also, of Fifty-eighth Alabama, is entitled to the same distinction for the energy and skill displayed by him in fortifying Rocky Face on the north side of the gap and constructing practicable roads to the top of the mountain and along its summit." (Official Records of the War of Rebellion (=O.R.), Serial 74, p. 816)

However, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's statement on page 304 of his *Narrative of Military Operations, Directed, During the Late War Between the States, by Joseph E. Johnston*

(=Johnston, Narr.) (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1874) refers to “...Stewart’s and Bate’s divisions in Mill Creek Gap, in which they had constructed some slight defensive works...” suggests that Bate’s Division constructed the defenses on the crest of the Ridge where they were deployed, while Stewart fortified the actual Gap and the ascent of the Ridge to its north. That Johnston referred to the fortifications as “some slight defensive works” is peculiar, since they stand to this day, and some are quite massive in places.

Presumably, construction of the defenseworks began shortly after Stewart was first positioned there on the morning of Feb. 23, 1864 . (Johnston, Narr., p. 283). Joseph Bogle’s account of Lieutenant-Colonel Curtis’ being shot while standing on the breastworks clearly references fortifications in this vicinity. (*Some Recollections of the Civil War*. Dalton, GA: Sons of Confederate Veterans, Joseph E. Johnston Camp #671, 1995, p. 8) (=Recollections)

Stewart’s Division was deployed here: Baker’s Brigade in the Gap, Stanford’s Miss Battery above, then Stovall’s Brigade, and Clayton’s Brigade near the top. 54th Ala was in a skirmish line in front of Baker.

Federal skirmishers made “one threat of serious assault” in late afternoon of Feb 25, 1864. (Johnston, Narr., p. 284; also O.R. Serial 57, p. 478) *Some Recollections of the Civil War* contains eye-witness accounts of this incident by Joseph Bogle (pp. 7&8), William Lowndes (pp. 24&25), and J.B. Stubbs (pp. 25&26). The Federals were driven back by the fire of a battery in front and musketry from above (Johnston, Narr., p. 284; Recollections, pp. 7, 8, 24-26).

May 9, 1864 Federals assaulted Stewart in the Gap (Johnston, Narr., p. 306; O.R. Serial 72, pp. 846-847), and there were skirmishes on the 10th (Johnston, Narr., p. 308; O.R. Serial 72, pp. 847-848). On both days, the Federals were driven back. (Johnston, Narr., pp. 306, 308).

Specific military activity in the Cheatham-Stephenson Section of the District: Cheatham and Stephenson were deployed here on May 5, 1864. It is probable that they constructed the defenseworks at that time, given a captured Confederate’s account on May 8, 1864 that “they have been fortifying for several days on Rocky Face Ridge” (O.R. Serial 72, p. 844). The Federal breastworks were constructed on May 8 and 9, 1864, as Federal troops advanced down the ridge from the north.

On May 8, 1864, extensive skirmishing broke out all along Rocky Face, and that day and the next, 8th Harker’s Brigade of Newton’s Division, Howard’s Corps (USA) advanced southward down the crest of the ridge and drove its defenders back until they encountered Pettus and Brown’s positions, where they were repulsed (O.R. Serial 72, pp. 140 and 843-846; Johnston, Narr. 306-307).

Applicable National Register Criteria

Criterion A: Association with historic events or activities. As a battlefield in the opening phase of a significant Campaign of the Civil War, the proposed district is associated with a defining event in American history.

Criterion C: distinctive design or physical characteristics. Structures present are good examples of stone and earthen breastworks, trenches, gun emplacements, and other types of military architecture.

Criterion D: potential to yield important information about prehistory or history. Very little subsurface archaeology has been done in the areas under consideration, and it is beyond dispute that surface resources indicate that subsurface excavation would yield more archaeological resources and additional information about the battles fought here.

Bibliography

Among sources consulted for this report were:

Atlanta Campaign Historic Resources Survey Report, Phase I. The Jaeger Company. Gainesville, GA, 2000.

John Black (former CSA soldier). Unpublished Lesche Club (Dalton) Speech, Dalton Campaign of 1863-64, delivered February 17, 1896.

Polly Boggess, compiler. Dalton Remembers the War Between the States. Dalton, GA: United Daughters of the Confederacy, Drewry R. Smith Chapter #2522, 1996.

Joseph E. Johnston. Narrative of Military Operations, Directed, During the Late War Between the States, by Joseph E. Johnston. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1874.

Kevin P. McAuliff, Project Manager. Summary of Significance of Civil War Features at Five Sites in and Near Dalton, GA: To accompany An Archaeological Survey of Civil War Features Within Five Tracts Near Dalton Georgia. Dalton: North Georgia Regional Development Center. July, 2005.

The Official Records of the War of Rebellion, available on-line at www.ehistory.com

Darrel Roberts. The Gray Winter of 1864 in Dalton. Dalton: Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, 1991.

Some Recollections of the Civil War by a Private in the 40th GA Regiment, C.S.A. Dalton, GA: Sons of Confederate Veterans, Joseph E. Johnston Camp #671, 1995.

William R. Scaife. The Campaign for Atlanta. Atlanta: McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., 1993.

William F. Stanyard, Principal Investigator. An Archaeological Survey of Civil War Features Within Five Tracts Near Dalton Georgia. TRC Project Number: 46941. April, 2005.

Geographical Data

Acreage: 657 +/-

Boundary Description: The boundaries shall be those described roughly on the attached map, and more specifically as:

The Cheatham-Stevenson Section

A certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in Land Lot Nos. 4, 5, 34, 35, 42, 43, 72 and 81 of the 12th District and 3rd Section of Whitfield County, Georgia, and being more particularly depicted as 625 acres according to plat of survey of Norman DeLoach, Georgia Registered Land Survey 1347, dated November 29, 2001, and more particularly described as follows, to-wit:

BEGINNING at the northeast corner of Land Lot No. 34 at an axle found, which corner is common with the southeast corner of Land Lot No.5, the southwest corner of Land Lot No.6, and northwest corner of Land Lot No. 33, said District and Section; thence south 00 degrees 05 minutes 06 seconds east along the eastern boundary of said Land Lot No. 34 a distance of 1272.22 feet to a ½ inch pipe; thence continuing along said eastern land lot line south 01 degrees 35 minutes 40 seconds, west 627.64 feet to a concrete marker; thence continuing along said eastern land lot line south 01 degrees 03 minutes 29 seconds west 716.43 feet to the southeast corner of Land Lot 34, which corner is common with the southwest corner of Land Lot 33, the northwest corner of Land Lot 44, and the northeast corner of Land Lot 43; thence continuing south 01 degrees 03 minutes 29 seconds west along the eastern boundary of Land Lot 43 a distance of 2575.28 feet to a crimp top iron in rock pile representing the southeast corner of said land lot, which corner is common with the southwest corner of Land Lot 44, the northwest corner of Land Lot 71 and the northeast corner of Land Lot 72; thence continuing south along the eastern boundary of Land Lot 72 south 00 degrees 53 minutes 22 seconds west 2618.33 feet to a 3/4 inch pipe in rock pile representing the southeast corner of Land Lot 72, said corner common with the southwest corner of Land Lot 71, the northwest corner of Land Lot 82 and the northeast corner of Land Lot 81; thence continuing south 02 degrees 36 minutes 06 seconds west along the eastern boundary of Land Lot 81 a distance of 1433.72 feet to a metal post (Bowater); thence continuing along said eastern boundary south 00 degree 40 minutes 51 second west 549.73 feet to a rebar found; thence continuing along said eastern boundary south 00 degrees 40 minutes 51 seconds west 304.50 feet to the iron pin placed; thence departing from said eastern boundary and proceeding north 57 degrees 49 minutes 38 seconds west 1524.27 feet to an iron pin placed; thence north 00 degrees 52 minutes 05 seconds east 1453.24 feet to an iron pin placed on the northern boundary of Land Lot 81, said District and Section; thence south 89 degrees 04 minutes 28 seconds west along said land lot line 1320.00 feet to a bolt in rock pile representing the southwest corner of Land Lot 72, which corner is common with the northwest corner of Land Lot 81, the northeast corner of Land Lot 80 and southeast corner of Land Lot 73; thence north 01 degrees 06 minutes 31 seconds west along the western boundary of Land Lot 72 a distance of 2654.32 feet to an iron pin placed representing the northwest corner of Land Lot 72, which corner is common with the northeast corner of Land Lot 73, the southeast corner of Land Lot 42 and the southwest corner of Land Lot 43; thence south 88 degrees 53 minutes 29 seconds west along the southern boundary of Land Lot 42 a distance of 330.28 feet to an iron pin placed at the intersection of said land lot line and the eastern right of way of Interstate 75; thence along said

eastern right of way the following courses and distances, to-wit: north 00 degrees 01 minute 54 seconds west 295.00 feet to a point; north 89 degrees 58 minutes 06 seconds east 40.00 feet to a point; north 00 degrees 01 minute 54 seconds west 100.00 feet to a point; south 89 degrees 58 minutes 06 seconds west 40.00 feet to a point; thence north 00 degrees 03 minutes' 15 seconds west 2192.39 feet to a rebar found on the southern boundary of Land Lot 35, said District and Section; thence departing from said right of way and proceeding north 89 degrees 05 minutes 56 seconds east along said southern land lot line 282.68 feet to the southeast corner of said land lot, said corner common with the southwest corner of Land Lot 34, the northwest corner of Land Lot 43 and the northeast corner of Land Lot 42; thence north 04 degrees 55 minutes 18 seconds east along the eastern boundary of said Land Lot 35 a distance of 870.58 feet to a point; thence north 86 degrees 29 minutes 32 seconds west 358.62 feet to a rebar found on the eastern right of way of Interstate 75; thence continuing along said right of way north 00 degree 01 minutes 47 seconds west 2224.03 feet to a rebar found in Land Lot 4, said District and Section, and on the eastern boundary of said right of way; thence departing from said right of way north 89 degrees 21 minutes 14 seconds east 3210.83 feet to an iron pin placed on the eastern boundary of Land Lot 5, said District and Section; thence south 04 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west 530.00 feet to an axle found representing the southeast corner of Land Lot 5, said District and Section and the true point of beginning.

And the Stewart Section

A certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in Land Lot 119 of the 12th District and 3rd Section of Whitfield County, Georgia, and being more particularly described on a plat entitled "Plat for Looper, Et Al and Whitfield County" prepared by N. B. DeLoach, Georgia Registered Land Surveyor No. 1347, dated November 30, 2001, as follows, to-wit:

TO FIND THE TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING begin at the northeast corner of said Land Lot 119 (said corner being the point of intersection of said Land Lot 119, Land Lot 110, Land Lot 109 and Land Lot 120 of the 12th District and 3rd Section of Whitfield County, Georgia), thence proceed south 89 degrees 42 minutes 52 seconds west along the north line of said Land Lot 119, a distance of 1172.58 feet, thence south 00 degrees 53 minutes 15 seconds east along the west line of property now or formerly belonging to Wayne Lewis 977.08 feet, thence south 00 degrees 49 minutes 13 seconds east 906.56 feet to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING; thence south 00 degrees 49 minutes 13 seconds east 853.90 feet to a 1 inch pipe found on the south line of said Land Lot 119; thence south 89 degrees 16 minutes 54 seconds west along the south line of said land lot a distance of 893.08 feet to the easterly right of way of Interstate Highway 75; thence along the easterly right of way of said Interstate Highway 75 the following courses and distances, to-wit: North 41 degrees 40 minutes 15 seconds west 357.43 feet to a right of way marker, north 53 degrees 37 minutes 45 seconds east 221.00 feet to a right of way marker and north 25 degrees 57 minutes 15 seconds west 213.00 feet; thence leaving the easterly right of way of said Interstate and proceeding north 75 degrees 04 minutes 45 seconds east 1069.76 feet to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING.

SUBJECT TO THAT 60 FEET IN WIDTH EASEMENT FOR INGRESS AND EGRESS shown on the above referenced plat by N. B. DeLoach, said plat being of record in Plat Cabinet C, Slide 2441, in the Office of the Clerk of the: Superior Court of Whitfield County, Georgia. The tract of

land conveyed herein is shown on said plat to measure 16.85 acres.

The above described properties are subject to easements, restrictions and covenants of record in so far as the same may lawfully affect them.

Boundary Justification: The proposed local district is composed of those parts of the Rocky Face Battlefield owned by Whitfield County. The County proposes designation only of its own holdings at this time.

Form Prepared By

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Date: January 19, 2006