

Observatory Mesa Trail Plan – Heritage Resource Protection

The presented draft plan is complex, the plan calls for the continued access to the Mesa for day-use recreational opportunities. The plan as it relates to the protection of Cultural Resources proposes to limit and close unofficial trails that are damaging to the mesa, thus also protecting potential negative impacts to any Cultural Resources. Most of the information is technical and specific with those that are more familiar with recreational and open space development and management.

Access to Observatory Mesa and heritage resource has a relationship to Thorpe Park and the Townsite neighborhood. The plan calls out trail heads and limiting parking impacts while improving adjacent resident's access. Any additional utilization and traffic through the neighborhood would be a concern of the Townsite neighborhood and has been expressed in neighborhood meetings and by Townsite representatives. Townsite is a National Register District and includes a slightly larger historic design review overlay zone.

Townsite residents have noted that significant traffic speed on Santa Fe that continues up Mars Hill Road to the Observatory is presenting a major safety problem to pedestrians and additional safety issues with bicyclists winding up the narrow Mars Hill Road. It should also be noted that many people ascend the hill to the city overlook without continuing to Lowell Observatory. Lowell's new and large Discovery Building will also impose additional traffic. The Trail Plan calls out the development of a FUTS as "Long Term" though the graphic and plan description are not clear about timing. Providing safe Ped/Bike route from Thorpe Park and Townsite to access the Mesa would appear to be a short-term priority vs. long-term in the best interest of the public.

The adaptive reuse utilization of the historically significant Mars Hill wagon road has been a Heritage Preservation Office priority. This original wagon road route to Mars Hill and the preservation of the stone abutments remaining at this entry point are from the original location of the Saturn Gates. The HPO has requested funding for the stone pillars from Lowell Observatory as well as a funding request from BPAC both of which have been lower priorities to date. Though the Gates were relocated up at Lowell's main facilities the stone abutments were evaluated and included in the Lowell National Historic Landmark District, National Register of Historic Places. An earlier development of a FUTS could likely move up priorities in the preservation of the gate abutments. The FUTS development and the stone abutments rehabilitation to include interpretive aspects will be important to providing an alternative Ped/Bike route to the observatory for both visitors and residents. Efforts are to continue to work with Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff BPAC and other funding sources to make the Mars Hill historic route an earlier priority.

Mars Hill Trail – Stone Abutments NHL Listed, interpretive features

Introduction:

The Lowell Observatory was declared a National Landmark in 1965. The various buildings, telescopes and the mausoleum where Percival Lowell is entombed make up the contributing elements of the Lowell National Historic Landmark District (NHL). There are many districts and individual properties that are listed in the National Register of Historic places, but it is the designation of "Landmark" that makes these historic properties truly special. Only a little over three percent of all listings are considered as National Landmarks. The designation fully acknowledges that Landmarks, be they natural, or historic,

are elevated in National significance and tied to the development of the Nation. The Lowell Observatory has also been acknowledged by TIME magazine, listed it as one of “The World's 100 Most Important Places” in 2011.

Almost all the components of the Lowell NHLD are located on the mesa of Mars Hill with the exception of the remains of stone abutments that once supported the mounting of the “Saturn Gates”. The Gates were moved from their original location and are now installed among the various buildings of the NHLD. The Saturn Gates as well as the stone abutments were designed by Percival Lowell.

One may think that the stone abutments may not be significant with the removal of the iron gate component, that was not the case. When evaluating the NHLD for listing they were included in the district. The listing fully acknowledged the stone abutments significance and included them with as separate boundary from the main boundary on the hill. The boundary for the abutments is defined as a 50-foot radius with its center point located between the two abutments. The center point defining the entry point on the original route to the Observatory which is the historic Mars Hill Wagon Road.

The naming of Mars Road as well as Mars hill was the result of Flagstaff Locals acknowledging Lowell’s obsession in the study of Mars and became the known nomenclature. The Town of Flagstaff did acknowledge that Lowell’s efforts were an economic development opportunity for the Town and assisted with donating the land and the development of the wagon road. Another important long-term aspect was providing water to the development on the hill. A newer pumphouse on the original watermain route is located just beyond the abutments. It is important to call out that the eastern abutment has unique aspects that once dispensed water and are integral to the structure.

The specifics of property ownerships and transfers are not known at this time without further investigation. All mapping indicates that the ownership of the property and the stone abutments are under the ownership and control of the City of Flagstaff.



