



Campsites of the March


March 21-24, 1965

- David Hall Farm (March 21)
- Rosie Steele Farm (March 22)
- Robert Gardner Farm (March 23)
- City of St. Jude (March 24)

Foreshadowing the mass encampment, later known as "Tent City," most of the participants in the Selma-to-Montgomery March embarked upon their journey bearing little more than the clothes on their back, a bedroll, or a knapsack to ease the strain of the 54-mile journey along U.S. Highway 80.

Fifty-four miles to freedom

Facing the cold early spring rains and near-freezing nights, the marchers employed creativity to survive the journey. A "people in motion," they knew that potential danger lurked around every creek bed or cluster of trees. Even antagonistic National Guardsmen who were present to insure the safety of the marchers posed a potential threat. This legion of activists was prepared at a moment's notice to seek cover in the event of any emergency. An integral part of the logistical planning for their mission was covering overnight accommodations. Campsites were the obvious and most immediate choice for such a large body, but where? About six miles from Selma, near a rail crossing, 1,000 marchers were to be entrained back to Selma, but instead they remained. The number of participants was now in excess of 10, 000, with more expected. Many African Americans in rural Lowndes County were



sharecroppers on land owned by whites who opposed civil rights and used intimidation tactics to discourage support of the marchers.

Resting places for the warriors

David Hall, an African-American farmer and father of eight, lived in a four-room house on an 80-acre farm in Dallas County. The first night of the march was critical to the morale of the marchers in an obviously hostile environment. Aware of this situation, Hall became the first black farmer to courageously face harassment from white landowners in the county when he welcomed the marchers to camp on his land for the night. Crews that traveled ahead in trucks set up tents at the site, separated by gender. While volunteer "security marshals" patrolled the campgrounds, physicians and nurses among the marchers answered sick calls and tended to injuries sustained during the protracted journey.

The marcher's endured rain on two days of the march as the procession continued along the narrow ribbon of Highway 80. Nearby farm communities such as Trickem Fork, other African-American farm families, risking eviction by white landowners, came out in support of the "March to Montgomery," some bringing food and water or blankets. Mrs. Rosie Steele and Robert Gardner lent their support by providing their land as campsites for the following two nights of the march. Such outpouring of courage in the face of violent resistance brought the March to its successful final night at the City of St. Jude, a Catholic social service complex, where the now famous "Stars for Freedom" Rally was held on March 24, 1965. Though a necessary element for the safety and well-being of the participants, these campsites also served as incubators for life-long comradeship, a strengthening of morale, and improved resolve during the stress-filled nights of the march.