

# Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area

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## With Utah, MPNHA remembers the 2002 Winter Olympics

MT. PLEASANT — As the state of Utah recalls its Olympic days of glory of 10 years ago, the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area\* (MPNHA) is also proud to commemorate its own role in the 2002 Winter Olympic Games.

To be accurate, there was no Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area in 2002. But by then, plans were underway to create the Utah Heritage Highway 89 as the MPNHA's managing

The UHHA's efforts consolidate and crystallize eventually become the good portion of central and Highway 89 corridor and the Route 24 and S.R. 12, Utah's National Scenic By-way).

By taking an active spot sponsoring tours to central Utah, the Olympic Torch Relay, and even "adopting" the Danish Olympic team, the UHHA helped central and southern Utah get a bit of peripheral illumination from the spotlight which then was on Salt Lake City.

With the world's eyes on Utah during February 2002, "We felt the Olympics were a good time to draw attention to our heritage along Highway 89," says Monte Bona, executive director of the MPNHA.

the heritage area out of its forerunner, Alliance (UHHA), which still exists entity.

during the Olympics helped plans for what would MPNHA, which comprises a southern Utah along the U.S. Boulder Loop (Utah State only All-American Road and a

at the Games' media center, producing a country music song for



**SALT LAKE 2002**



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The heritage along U.S. 89 is considered by many to be the most distinctively representative of Utah outside the Salt Lake City area, a significance recognized by the route taken by the Olympic Flame as it made its way to Salt Lake City. The torch entered U.S. 89 near Bryce Canyon, and followed the highway through the central portion of the state.

In honor of the torch passing through the area, Bona and others wrote and produced a song, "The Flame Within." The idea behind the song, Bona says, was that "The Olympics demonstrate characteristics we thought were the same as those that motivated the pioneers to colonize along Highway 89. We wanted to tie our heritage along Highway 89 to the spirit of the Olympics."

During the Olympics, the UHHA hosted an information booth at the Media Center in conjunction with the Sanpete County Heritage Council and the Utah Travel Council. The booth provided information about Highway 89, including press conferences on certain historical and cultural highlights from the highway. The press conferences led to international news publications and broadcasts about the highway.

U.S. 89 was also featured in a special Olympic edition of Salt Lake Magazine as one of Utah's non-Olympic-related "hot spots." The article's writer, Meredith Nelson, said at the time that U.S. 89 was "culturally significant enough" to warrant particular mention beyond mere inclusion in a list. A travel company helped arrange three-day tours of U.S. 89 for Olympic visitors who decided to take Nelson up on the suggestion.

Two artisans from Sanpete County made featured contributions to the Olympics. Ephraim resident Lorin Cummings designed and built replica Navajo structures, which became part of the "Discover Navajo: People of the Fourth World" exhibit at the Gateway development during the Olympics. And Winnie Wood of Mt. Pleasant provided a backdrop used in an Olympic edition of The Late Show with Dave Letterman.

Recognizing the significant role mid-1800s Danish immigrants played in settling Sanpete County, known as "Little Denmark" — one of the MPNHA's five heritage districts — Mt. Pleasant City "adopted" the Danish national team, cordially inviting them and others from "old" Denmark to visit the city during their Olympic stay.

Of the cumulative Olympic effort, Bona said, "We took this very seriously because we thought the Heritage Highway was a great example of the Olympic spirit."

The result, Bona said, "It was definitely a success for the highway."

That success encouraged plans to create the MPNHA. Former Utah Senator Robert Bennett spearheaded that plan in Washington, D.C., sponsoring a bill in 2003 to create the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area.

The bill passed in the Senate, but it took a few tries to get through the House of Representatives, which, on a symbolically significant even if unintentional date, approved the bill on July 24, 2006.

The MPNHA was officially created under the pen of President George W. Bush later that year.

As the 2002 Olympics have been described as Utah's cultural "coming of age," they were also important in the gestation of the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, now one of Utah's cultural gems.

The MPNHA, then as its predecessor the UHHA, is proud to have played a part in what many consider to be the most successful Winter Olympic Games in history.

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\*The Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area (MPNHA) is a federally designated area of central and southern Utah running along the beautiful and historic U.S. Highway 89—including the scenic by-ways of Utah state routes 12 and 24 which both intersect with U.S. 89 and, together, form the MPNHA's Boulder Loop. The area includes the counties of Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane.

The Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance is the local coordinating entity of the MPNHA. Its purpose is to preserve, tell and interpret the stories, history and heritage of the area, and to promote its culture and value.

[www.mormonpioneerheritage.org](http://www.mormonpioneerheritage.org)