

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: South Side High School Sign

Other names/site number: Site #VB0258

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 334 Southside Road

City or town: Bee Branch State: Arkansas County: Van Buren

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

<p style="font-size: 2em; font-family: cursive; margin: 0;"><i>Steph...</i></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.5em; margin: 0;">11-20-22</p>
<p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b> <u>Arkansas Historic Preservation Program</u></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
<p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

<p><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
<p><b>Title :</b> _____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	



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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object



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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____ <u>1</u> _____	_____	objects
_____ <u>1</u> _____	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATIONAL AND CULTURE/ work of art

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATIONAL AND CULTURE/ work of art

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE, CONCRETE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Constructed by the National Youth Administration (NYA) in 1937, the South Side High School Sign consists of the roughly five-foot tall by four-foot wide stones held together by mortar, painted white that spell out SOUTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL facing west to U.S. Highway 65. The sign is built on a slight berm that was constructed to make the sign more visible from U.S. 65. A cement marker was placed at the south end of the sign that reads "NYA / 2713-Y-10 / 1937."

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### Narrative Description

The South Side High School sign is located approximately 350 feet east of U.S. 65 on the South Side High School campus. It sits halfway up South Side hill overlooking U.S Highway 65, in Bee Branch, Arkansas, and is constructed on a slight berm that was built up in order to make the sign more visible from U.S. 65.

The sign is made from field stones that are mortared together by cement and it is painted a bright white color to stand out to travelers along highway 65. Each of the sign's letters are approximately five feet tall and four feet wide, and the entire sign is approximately 100 feet wide. The South Side High School Sign was built in 1937 by the National Youth



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Administration, a division of the WPA. The South Side High School Sign is the only school sign of its kind known to exist in the state.

At the southwest corner of the sign, a cement marker was placed that reads "NYA / 2713-Y-10 / 1937."

**Integrity**

Overall, the South Side High School Sign has excellent integrity from the time of its construction in 1937. It is likely that some of the mortar has been replaced over time, and the sign has been repainted numerous times in order to keep it white and visible from the highway. The setting of the sign also still reflects its historic setting, which was on the edge of the South Side High School campus. In fact, some of the buildings on the campus also date back to the 1930s and were also built by the WPA. As a result, the South Side High School Sign is still able to convey those qualities that make it significant.



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### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1937

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1937: South Side High School sign is constructed

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

National Youth Administration, Builder

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The South Side High School Sign, located in Bee Branch, Van Buren County, Arkansas, and constructed in 1937, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** in the area of Social History. The South Side High School sign is a very prominent marker for the South Side School District, and is an important reminder of the work of the National Youth Administration (NYA) in Van Buren County. The sign also stands as a unique piece of art in the Bee Branch community and is a landmark to travelers traveling to Clinton or Conway on U.S Highway 65. The sign also commemorates the hard work of the National Youth Administration in Van Buren County as well as being the only rock school sign of its kind in the county.

The sign has never had any alternations since it was constructed 85 years ago, and the sign was even originally painted white. Even today, the school district regularly paints the sign to keep the bright white historic look.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### **HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY**

Although it is not known exactly when European settlement began to occur in the Van Buren County area, it is believed that it began in the 1820s. Of the early settlers, John L. Lafferty was the one who had the biggest role in the creation of Van Buren County. Lafferty had a large plantation in "The Big Bottoms" area (now under Greers Ferry Lake) where the three branches of the Little Red River existed. The increased settlement in the area, along with the distance from the area to other county seats, illustrated the need for a more localized government. Due to Lafferty's efforts, Van Buren County was created on November 11, 1833. The new county was named for then Vice President Martin Van Buren.<sup>1</sup>

The original county seat was located at Mudtown, which became known as Bloomington, had a post office established in 1840 that was near Lafferty's home. Originally, the county's business was carried out in the home of Obadiah Marsh, although a one-room log building was soon constructed as the county's first courthouse. By 1840, the county had 243 families and a total population of approximately 1,500, and by 1850 there were 448 families and a total population of 2,864.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baker, Sharon. "Van Buren County." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/van-buren-county-817/>.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, Sharon. "Van Buren County." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/van-buren-county-817/>.



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Van Buren County's county seat remained at Bloomington until 1842 when it was moved to Clinton. As at Bloomington, a one-room log building served as the initial courthouse until a two-story frame courthouse was constructed later.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, there was little in the way of industry or economic development, although that changed when the Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad built a railroad line through the area in 1910. The construction of the railroad line allowed the timber industry to develop in the area, and it also allowed the county's population to continue a slow growth.

One of the towns that developed during the nineteenth century was Bee Branch. Although very little is known about the community, it is known that they had a post office established in 1860.<sup>4</sup> South Side Bee Branch Public School District is located two miles south of Bee Branch, Arkansas, on U.S Highway 65. Bee Branch was incorporated in 1860 and Willie D. Neal was appointed the first postmaster of the area. In 1879 the community moved to the present-day city limits of Bee Branch at the corner of Arkansas Highway 92 and U.S Highway 65, originally to be called "Crossroads," but the community was denied being called that due to a number of communities called "Crossroads" in the general area. By 1912 Bee Branch was a booming town, many stores were built along the main roads as well as many notable homes. In October of 1929 the South Side Bee Branch School District was established, and the First Superintendent was J.K. Bess. The same year an agriculture building was constructed, and in 1936 the WPA constructed a Gymnasium for the high school, as well as a Home Economic Cottage.<sup>5</sup>

However, like much of Van Buren County's population, the people of Bee Branch were affected by the Great Depression. During the period, little money circulated, and a bartering system evolved. Farmers, for example, traded eggs and poultry to merchants for items such as sugar and flour. The economic conditions in Van Buren County also brought programs such as the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps to the county. The programs built Van Buren County's current courthouse along with several of the county's schools, and the CCC also established two camps in the county. One of the school campuses that was improved by the New Deal programs was the South Side campus south of Bee Branch.<sup>6</sup>

The WPA constructed several buildings on the South Side campus, including the Gymnasium, which was built in 1936, and the NYA built the South Side High School Sign in 1937. Although not known for sure, it is possible that the stone for the sign was left over from the Gymnasium's construction the year before.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Sharon. "Van Buren County." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/van-buren-county-817/>.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, Russell P. *Arkansas Post Offices From Memdag to Norsk: A Historical Directory, 1832-1900*. Little Rock: Arkansas Genealogical Society, Inc., 2006, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Depner, Gilbert (former Superintendent of South Side). "A History of South Side Schools." In the files of South Side High School.

<sup>6</sup> Baker, Sharon. "Van Buren County." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/van-buren-county-817/>.



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The NYA was established by executive order on June 26, 1935, and in Arkansas it was directed by Joseph W. Hull, president of Arkansas Polytechnic College. The NYA's state offices were in Russellville, although it also had district offices in Camden and Newport. Holloway Smith also worked with the NYA as "Supervisor of Negro Activities" in Pine Bluff. The activities that the NYA engaged in allowed the participants to learn practical work skills in areas like mechanics and construction that would hopefully lead to employment in the future. Between 1935 and 1938 the NYA spent around \$1,677,082 from 1935-1938 in Arkansas. With respect to school projects the NYA built 87 schools, 44 shop buildings, 67 vocational agriculture buildings, 50 home economics buildings, 15 teacherages, and 36 gymnasiums. They were also involved in repairing and remodeling 325 additional buildings before the program was ended in July 1943.<sup>7</sup>

In 1937, the South Side School District had the NYA to construct a school sign 157 yards from the newly constructed gymnasium. The sign bears the words in all caps "SOUTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL." The sign's letters are roughly five feet tall by four feet wide and are made from local fieldstones painted bright white; the sign runs parallel to U.S Highway 65. The sign is elevated from the natural slope of the hill by a berm of dirt that the NYA pulled from the present site of the school bus garage.

According to Sammy Collums, who graduated from South Side in 1949, the sign was built by a group of boys along with Morgan Montgomery. Montgomery was employed by the WPA, and the FFA built wood borders that spelled out the sign. Then Montgomery and the group placed the rocks within the wood borders so that the letters would be straight. Morgan was also involved in the masonry work for the WPA-built buildings at the school campus.<sup>8</sup>

The South Side High School Sign, which was also built by the NYA, represents a unique project for the program. The sign is also a very unique piece of art, and is the only sign of its kind known to have been built by the NYA. The sign is made of field stones that were either from the local quarries in Damascus or Clinton, or the stones were gathered from "Kill Dead Creek" which runs at the bottom of south side hill (known throughout Bee Branch community as "The Hill") by Highway 65. The stones were placed on a berm constructed by the NYA, and formed the words "SOUTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL" in all capital letters. Each letter is roughly the same height and width. Since the sign was built, the rocks have always been painted a bright white, which is one of the school's colors, in addition to blue. In order to keep the sign's historic look, the rocks are annually painted white. The sign is a unique piece of art due to the stacked rock and the bright white letters; most school signs that featured rocks in that time period was either rock pillars or a simple letter. In addition to the sign, a cement marker was placed at the south end of the sign that reads "NYA / 2713-Y-10 / 1937."

Since the South Side High School Sign was built, it has not been altered, except for being repainted and likely having some mortar repairs over the years. On November 15, 1988, an EF 3

<sup>7</sup> Christ, Mark. "National Youth Administration." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/national-youth-administration-6280/>.

<sup>8</sup> Collums, Sammy. Interview with Skylar Bradford. 29 November 2022.



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tornado ripped through the South Side Campus destroying the newly constructed high school and gymnasium as well as severely damaging the WPA Gym as well as the Old Main (also built by the WPA in 1941). The tornado came within a few feet of the sign, taking the roof off of the nearby Agriculture Building (present day bus shop), but surprisingly the sign remained intact after the storm. Today, the sign is a community landmark in the Bee Branch area, and remains a reminder of the work of the NYA in the Bee Branch area of Van Buren County.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY**

The South Side High School Sign is seen regularly throughout the community. The sign is featured on the home page of the school's website with school buses parked in the background to show school spirit to visitors. The sign is also featured annually in school athletic posters that are distributed throughout the community during high school sports season. The sign helps link the school back to the beginning of the school's establishment as well as a link to the time period in our nation's history when New Deal programs helped build buildings and structures to house our educational system in America. The sign, which overlooks U.S Highway 65, also attracts many visitors to the South Side campus; it's not unusual to find tourists heading north to Branson, Missouri, stopping by and taking pictures of the sign along with the WPA-built rock buildings behind it.

The South Side High School Sign shows a unique and historic way of advertising the school. Though many other South Side signs have existed over the years, the rock South Side High School Sign has withstood the test of time and continues to be a successful way to advertise the South Side School campus. The South Side High School Sign has also been a frequent figure in the South Side yearbooks throughout the years, being featured on front page table of contents, and even once being featured on the cover. The sign is thought of like a second school mascot to the faculty and students, and a constant reminder to past alumni passing by of all the good times spent at South Side.

Of the approximately 65 properties in the state that were built by the NYA and that have been documented by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, only two remain in Van Buren County. In addition, the South Side High School Sign is the only known sign that the NYA built in the state. As a result, it is a rare property type in the state and an unusual example of the NYA's work. Due to its importance for its associations with the work of the NYA in Van Buren County, the South Side High School Sign is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A**.



South Side High School Sign  
Name of Property

Van Buren County, Arkansas  
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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Baker, Russell P. *Arkansas Post Offices From Memdag to Norsk: A Historical Directory, 1832-1900*. Little Rock: Arkansas Genealogical Society, Inc., 2006.

Baker, Sharon. "Van Buren County." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/van-buren-county-817/>.

Christ, Mark. "National Youth Administration." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/national-youth-administration-6280/>.

Collums, Sammy. Interview with Skylar Bradford. 29 November 2022.

Depner, Gilbert (former Superintendent of South Side). "A History of South Side Schools." In the files of South Side High School.

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** VB0258



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### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre.

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates.

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.433 N | Longitude: 92.3616 W |
| 2. Latitude:          | Longitude:           |
| 3. Latitude:          | Longitude:           |
| 4. Latitude:          | Longitude:           |

**Or**

#### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |             |                 |                   |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 15 | Easting: 555488 | Northing: 3920927 |
| 2. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 3. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 4. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |

#### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Beginning at UTM Point 15/555479/3920946, proceed easterly for 40 feet to UTM Point 15/555491/3920946, thence proceed southerly for 120 feet to UTM Point 15/555491/3920909, thence proceed westerly for 40 feet to UTM Point 15/555479/3920909, thence proceed northerly for 120 feet to the point of beginning.

#### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the South Side High School Sign and its immediate surroundings.



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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Skylar Bradford, edited by Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey  
Coordinator  
organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
street & number: 1100 North Street  
city or town: Little Rock state: AR zip code: 72201  
e-mail: ralph.wilcox@arkansas.gov  
telephone: (501) 324-9787  
date: August 5, 2022

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5- or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)



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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: South Side High School Sign

City or Vicinity: Bee Branch

County: Van Buren

State: Arkansas

Photographer: Ralph S. Wilcox

Date Photographed: July 13, 2022

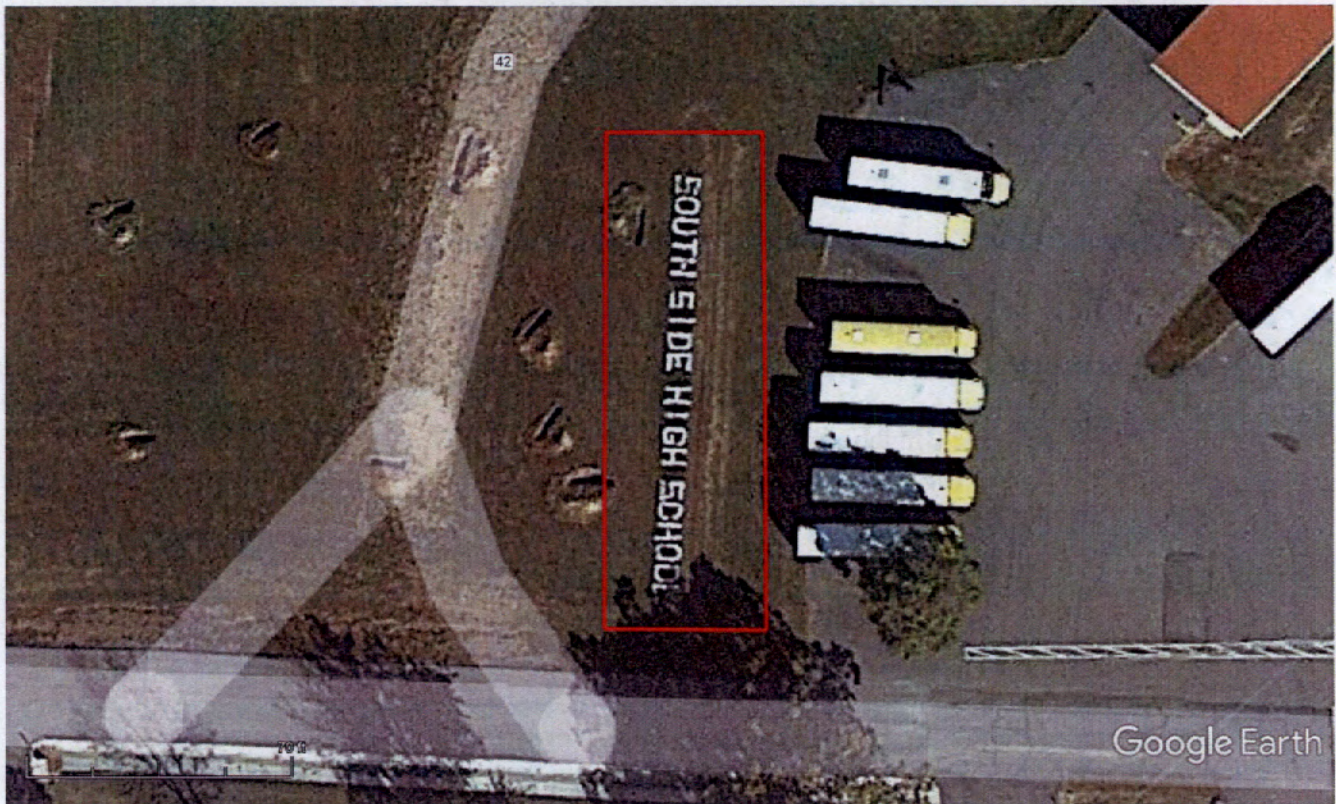
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Pictures have description by them.

- 1 of 7. South Side High School Sign, looking east.
- 2 of 7. "South" of the South Side High School Sign, looking northeast.
- 3 of 7. "Side" of the South Side High School Sign, looking northeast.
- 4 of 7. "High" of the South Side High School Sign, looking northeast.
- 5 of 7. "School" of the South Side High School Sign, looking northeast.
- 6 of 7. South Side High School Sign, looking north illustrating the berm.
- 7 of 7. NYA marker at the South Side High School Sign.



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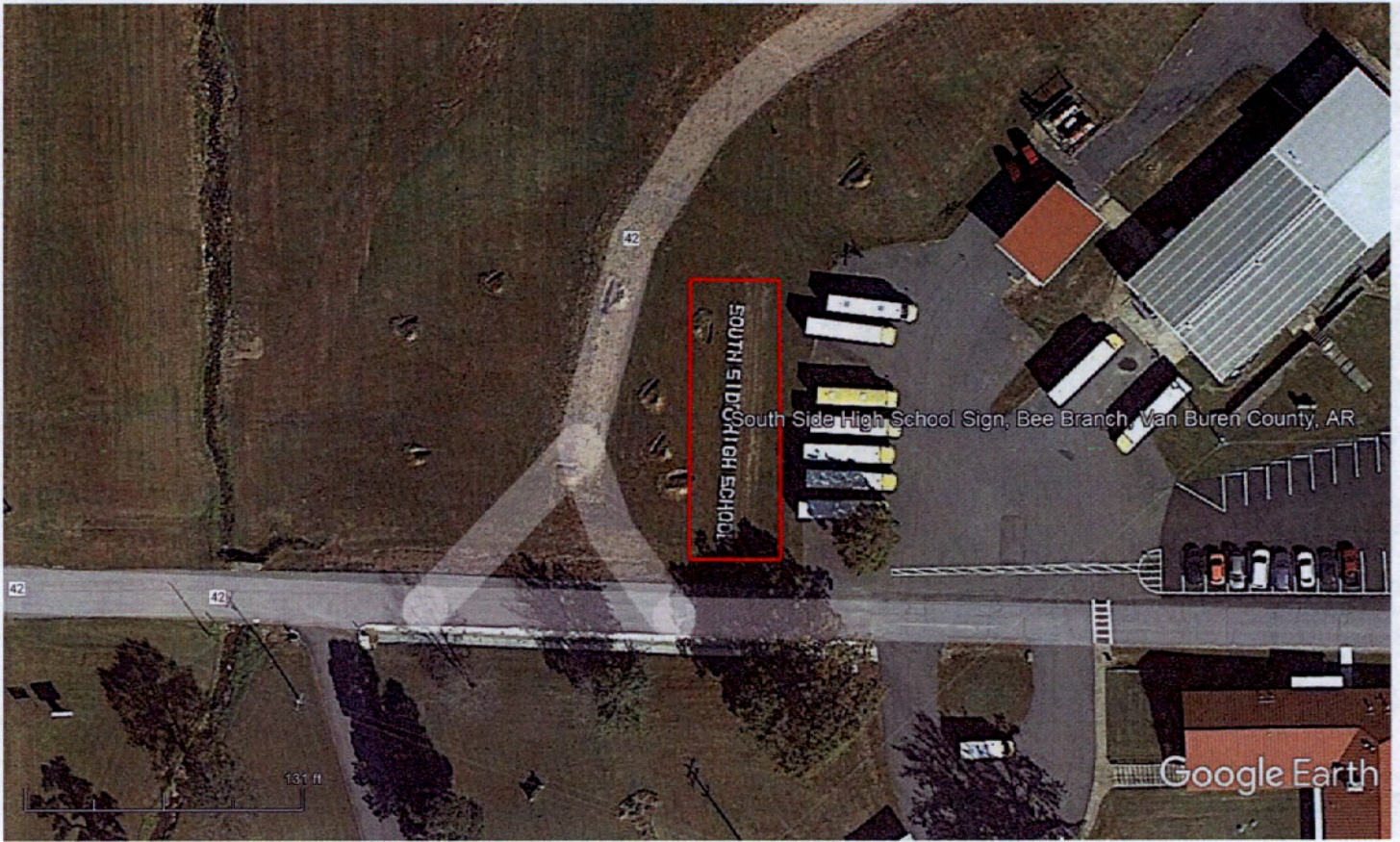


**Figure 1:** National Register boundary for the South Side High School Sign.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.





|-----131 feet-----|

South Side High School Sign  
Bee Branch, Van Buren County, Arkansas

UTM: 15 555488E 3920927N

↑  
North





|-----757 feet-----|

South Side High School Sign  
Bee Branch, Van Buren County, Arkansas

UTM: 15 555488E 3920927N

↑  
North









SCHOOL BUS

STOP

45-5-31



















