

Aggie Bonfire Memorial

Over nine decades, as it grew from a simple woodpile to its distinctive "wedding cake" design - thousands of logs stacked over thousands of hours to stand five-plus stories high - it also grew in meaning.

Bonfire came to symbolize the Aggie Spirit itself, and what it represents: hard work, determination and teamwork. Each year, from the few hundred students who built it to the tens of thousands who gathered to watch it light the November night, it brought the Aggie family together like nothing else.

And when the tragedy of Nov. 18, 1999, claimed 12 young lives and injured 27 others, once more it brought the Aggie family together. They came here by the thousands. They came to watch and wait; hope, pray and grieve; comfort and be comforted. Most of all, they came to offer what help they could.

This memorial is a place of respect. Its granite structure embodies the enduring nature of the Aggie Spirit symbolized by Bonfire, central to all Texas A&M traditions and borne by Aggies across the years.

This is a place for remembrance, dedicated to those lost and injured here that day and throughout Bonfire's history, whose lives and legacies are represented in its bronze features.

As we remember and celebrate their lives, we remember also the generous outpourings of sympathy and support from those in our community, from throughout Texas, across the nation and around the world. And we celebrate the Aggie Spirit bound forever to this place, which becomes a part of all who visit here.

This is a place of reverence. Here we contemplate the meaning and the magnitude of this solemn place that brings us together, even in our solitude.



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Texas A&M University

The Bonfire Memorial comprises three sections, each evoking a particular aspect of the Aggie Bonfire: tradition, history and spirit.

1. Visitors enter the memorial at Tradition Plaza, whose vertical wall serve as a barrier between the peace and intimacy of the memorial and the outside world. The wall is engraved with *The Last Corps Trip*, the poem traditionally recited before the lighting of each year's Bonfire; the view above the lower wall draws visitors into the memorial via History Walk.

2. Each of the 89 granite blocks along History Walk represents a year in which Bonfire burned between 1909 and 1998. Notches cut at a point 11/12ths of each stone's width represent November, the 11th month of the year and the month in which Bonfire burned. Amber lights set within the notches illuminate the walk at night, symbolizing the burning Bonfire.

3. Blocks representing 1955, 1982 and 1996 include bronze plaques memorializing students killed in Bonfire-related accidents in those years.

4. A black slab marks the year 1963, the year the Bonfire stack was disassembled, log-by-log, after President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

5. Twenty-seven granite blocks, connected by 12 portals, form the Spirit Ring, whose 170-foot diameter recreates the perimeter fence erected each year around the Bonfire stack. Bronze plaques set into each of the blocks represent the 27 Aggies injured in the 1999 collapse, yet they are left blank in recognition of all who were injured during Bonfire's 90-year history.

6. The interior of the Spirit Ring may be accessed through 12 portals, one for each Aggie lost in 1999. The outer, granite, portals stand 16 feet tall; and the interior, bronze, portals 12 feet. Each is on a line extending from the center of the ring to the hometown of the Aggie represented, and the bronze portal is engraved with three memorial elements - a portrait, his or her signature and a written reflection.

7. At the ring's center is a black-granite marker, 18 inches in diameter, representing the Bonfire stack's Centerpole. Positioned on the exact spot used for Centerpole, the marker is engraved with the date and time of the collapse: 11-18-1999 2:42 a.m.

