

 **Five-Star
Trails**

2ND EDITION

Birmingham

35 Beautiful Hikes in and around Central Alabama



 **American
Hiking
Society**

THOMAS SPENCER



MENASHA RIDGE PRESS

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982



Birmingham

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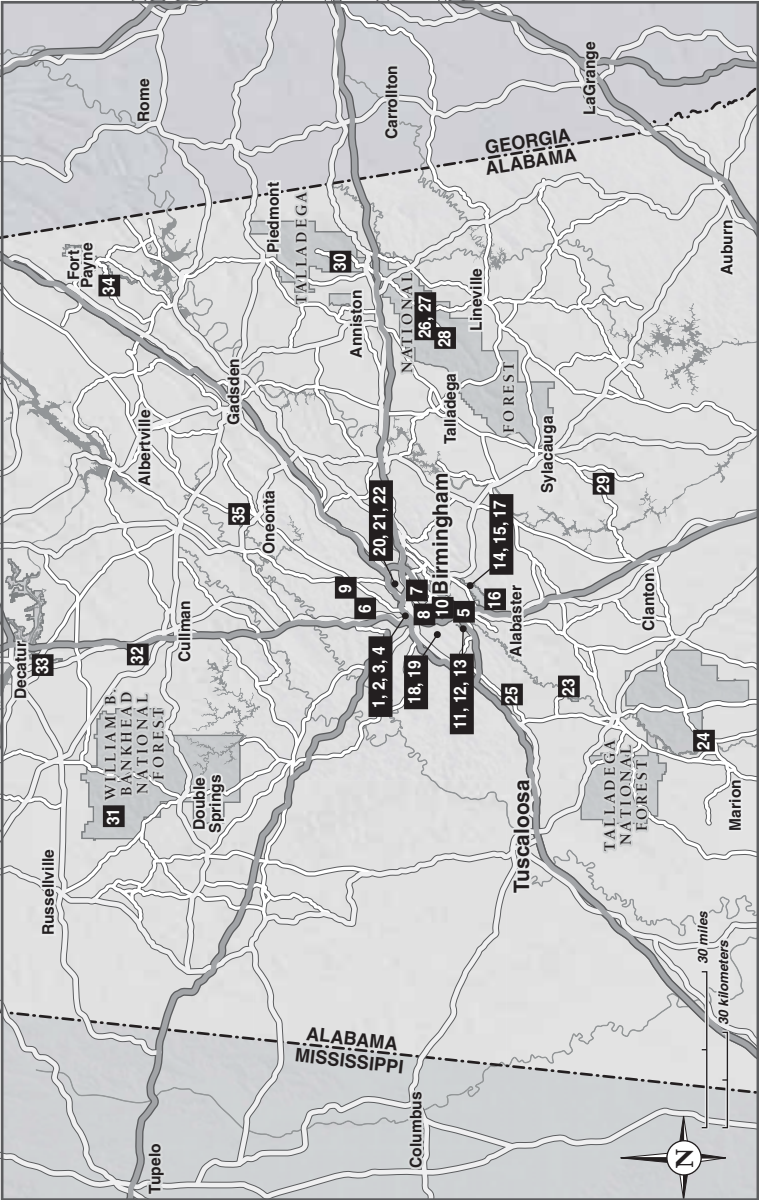
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Five-Star Trails: Birmingham





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DISCLAIMER This book is meant only as a guide to select trails in and around Birmingham, Alabama, and does not guarantee hiker safety in any way—you hike at your own risk. Neither Menasha Ridge Press nor Thomas Spencer is liable for property loss or damage, personal injury, or death that may result from accessing or hiking the trails described in this guide. Be especially cautious when walking in potentially hazardous terrains with, for example, steep inclines or drop-offs. Do not attempt to explore terrain that may be beyond your abilities. Please read carefully the introduction to this book, as well as safety information from other sources. Familiarize yourself with current weather reports and maps of the area you plan to visit (in addition to the maps provided in this guidebook). Be cognizant of park regulations, and always follow them. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this guidebook, land and road conditions, phone numbers and websites, and other information are subject to change.



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Dedication

I dedicate this book to our collective effort to preserve, protect, and improve access to this unique patch of the planet we've been blessed with.



Acknowledgments

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE ASSISTANCE of the staff and volunteers at the various federal, state, and local parks and preserves who aided me in compiling the information in this book and who work daily to support our enjoyment of these places.

I thank Scot Duncan, Jim Lacefield, Marjorie White, and Samford University biology professor Larry Davenport, who have produced great reference books I depended on and who rendered direct assistance that helped me put this book together. Information about their books and others is included in Appendix A (page 268).

Green spaces and trails don't just happen. Many people and organizations are active in protecting and expanding green space: the Freshwater Land Trust, The University of Alabama's Center for Economic Development, The Nature Conservancy, the Cahaba River Society, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Forever Wild, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, and Birmingham Urban Mountain Pedalers. The Rotary Club of Birmingham and the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham have each made significant contributions to the regional trail system. And fundamental to the support of parks and trails are state, county, and municipal governments that have increasingly recognized the importance of these places to our health and quality of life.

But most fundamental to this effort has been the support of my family. My parents, Clifford and Rita Spencer, always encouraged me to get outside and made possible so many adventures, particularly my participation in the Boy Scouts of America.

My wife, Ivy, and I have carried on that tradition with our children. Peter, James, and Anna shared many of these hikes with me and have begun to embark on great outdoor adventures of their own. I'm thankful for their support.

—Thomas Spencer



Preface

BIRMINGHAM IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES was built on natural resources: iron ore, coal, and limestone. These assets, the principal ingredients for making iron and steel, were mined from the mountains and valleys and moved to mills and furnaces on a web of railroads.

As we move into the 21st century and beyond our smoky industrial past, we're finding a different kind of value in our natural blessings. We're returning to our mountains and rivers to witness nature's resilience and endurance. We've cut through privet and kudzu to old iron ore-mining sites at Red Mountain Park. We're building a network of trails for walkers, runners, and bicyclists on abandoned rail corridors on Red Mountain, in the center of the city, and in the suburbs north of town along Five Mile Creek. Thanks to the Rotary Club of Birmingham, a replica of the **MAGIC CITY** sign that once greeted passengers arriving at Birmingham's Terminal Station now serves as a gateway to a greenway that already stretches from 20th Street South along First Avenue to Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, a trail that will soon extend to the revitalized Avondale neighborhood and beyond. Meanwhile, thanks to the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham, visitors to Birmingham's iconic Vulcan statue can now descend from its refurbished park and travel the former Birmingham Mineral Railroad on foot, or bike along an extended and improved rail-trail. Shelby County has added a new 1,505-acre park along the Cahaba River, turning land that was formerly mined for coal into an additional protected area along our precious and scenic river. Atop Flagg Mountain, the southernmost Appalachian mountain, volunteers have rebuilt cabins first constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression, creating a new trailhead for the Pinhoti Trail, our long-distance hiking trail that serves as a connector to (and may one day be the beginning of) the Appalachian Trail.

As we revisit these natural assets and historic sites, we can be awed by the scale of the efforts our ancestors made to move mountains: the ingenious engineering and the sweat and strength of the labor it took to lay the tracks, reshape the land, and punch endless miles of underground tunnels into the earth. We're also blazing trails through our city's civil rights history and, along the route, finding inspiration in the courage that made us a better city and a better country.



A WATER FEATURE AT ALDRIDGE GARDENS (SEE HIKE 5, PAGE 53)

In these places, we are also inspired to see what nature has done to recover, and we draw on some of that spirit to revive ourselves. As we've added new outdoor venues and expanded existing ones, it's been amazing to watch the trails fill with people hungry for fresh air and a fresh look at our native landscape.

We're finding that, in addition to our mineral wealth, this spot on the map has been blessed with a wealth of biodiversity found in few other places. We're doing more to protect it and celebrate it.

Since the turn of this century, we've restored Vulcan Park and Museum and paved and extended the Kiwanis Vulcan Trail. We've established Aldridge Gardens, Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and Cahaba River-Shelby County Park, Moss Rock Preserve, Railroad Park, Red Mountain Park, and Turkey Creek Nature Preserve.

Trails at Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve, Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park, and Oak Mountain State Park have been significantly expanded and improved. The Shades Creek Greenway was constructed in Homewood, with links established to greenways along the creek in Mountain Brook. A former railbed along Five Mile Creek north of Birmingham now supports 15.8 miles of trail, with another 20 miles planned.

Farther afield, there are new facilities and better access to natural wonders at Little River Canyon National Preserve, the Sipsey Wilderness, Cheaha State Park, and Barton's Beach and Perry Lakes Park on the Cahaba.

In Anniston, a former railroad line is now the Chief Ladiga Trail, on which you can bike almost 100 miles from Anniston to the outskirts of Atlanta. Anniston's Coldwater Mountain now boasts a world-class mountain-biking course on its peaks.

Perhaps most audacious of all, the Pinhoti Trail, the long-distance hiking trail that traverses the ridges of the Talladega National Forest, is now connected through Georgia to the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mountain. A hiker can start at the southernmost Appalachian mountain—Flagg Mountain, near Sylacauga—and trek to Maine.

It's a great time to take a walk.

Don't wait until your kids get older; they can handle more than you think. Don't listen to their complaints about hiking; they'll forget them 5 minutes into the woods.

Don't wait for perfect weather. Rain, or just after, is the ideal time to see waterfalls. When it's cold, you can go for miles without breaking a sweat. When it's hot, we have plenty of hikes that can end with a plunge into cool water. In the spring, you'll catch the early wildflowers. In the summer, the cicadas sing all day. In the fall, you get the colors, and in the winter, more views open up.

There are weekends in the fall when you can trust that the Tide or Tigers will win even if you aren't watching. Surely once a season, you can clear your calendar of practices and games. I guarantee the family will remember a trip to the Sipsey Wilderness better than they would a run-of-the-mill weekend at the sports fields.

We tend to think we have to take an out-of-state vacation to see natural wonders. Instead, drive an hour south to the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge. If you've ever spent a dawn at the tumbling shoals when the Cahaba lilies are in bloom and a blue heron is wading through the mist rising from the river, you've glimpsed Eden.

Trek along longleaf-pine ridges in the Talladega National Forest, among the grasses and wildflowers that have sprung back from the char of a prescribed burn.

Take in a sunset at Ruffner Mountain's Hawk's View. Ascend to the throne at King's Chair at Oak Mountain, or stand out on the rocky ledge at McDill Point at Cheaha. You'll feel high and grand.

At the base of Little River Canyon, you'll be awed by what a river's patient power can do over the course of millennia. And you'll realize you're a passenger in this tiny drop of time.



A FORMERLY NEGLECTED CORRIDOR DOWNTOWN HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A FOUR-BLOCK LINEAR PARK CALLED THE ROTARY TRAIL (SEE HIKE 4, PAGE 41).

You probably won't see a vermilion darter when you visit Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, but you'll feel proud that we're trying to protect the habitat of this tiny endangered fish that God decorated with every color of the rainbow.

If you see mussels and snails in the Cahaba River, you likely won't be able to identify the species, but you'll know there's more variety in our rivers than nearly anywhere else on the planet.

You might see a bald eagle at Perry Lakes Park on the Cahaba, but if you go to the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge at the right time of year, I guarantee you'll see a throng of lovely and charismatic sandhill cranes. With a little luck and planning, you could very well see whooping cranes, one of the world's most magnificent and most endangered species of bird.

It's a great time to take a walk.

And it's a great time to contribute your money, your labor, or your political support. Parks don't maintain themselves. State and local governments are cornerstones in keeping parks open. Let your political leaders know you value green space. If you hike in Alabama, it's hard to miss the contribution the Boy Scouts have made. Statewide trail groups work all over to clear your way through the woods. Conservation groups work tirelessly to protect special places and the wider environment that sustains us and inspires us. These volunteer groups are also essential and would welcome your help and support.

In compiling this book, I've pitched in and ventured out. I found that whatever energy I expended in those pursuits was returned to me many times over.

William Bartram, the great American naturalist of the 18th century, explored the country, including Alabama, cataloging species then new to science. He wrote that he was "continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity in pursuit of new productions of nature," adding that "my chief happiness consists in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty, and perfection of the great almighty Creator."

Catch that spirit. You'll get up in the morning wondering whether those flowers you saw yesterday bloomed overnight. You'll ask yourself how much water is tumbling down Peavine Falls today. Will this be the day the autumn leaves reach their peak of glory? And you'll want to go see. These are things you can't record and watch later. You've got to go.



Recommended Hikes

Best for Dogs

- 18–19** Red Mountain Park p. 137
- 20–22** Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve p. 155

Best for Fall Color

- 14** Oak Mountain State Park: King's Chair Loop p. 116
- 19** Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve: Ridge and Valley Loop p. 160
- 26–27** Cheaha State Park and vicinity p. 202 and p. 207
- 34** Little River Canyon National Preserve: Eberhart Trail p. 256
- 35** Palisades Park and the Bridges of Blount County p. 262

Best for Geology

- 11–13** Moss Rock Preserve p. 89
- 18–19** Red Mountain Park p. 137
- 20–22** Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve p. 155
- 25** Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park p. 191

Best for History

- 1** Civil Rights Heritage Trail: Birmingham's Walk to Freedom p. 21
- 3** Oak Hill Cemetery p. 35
- 4** Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces p. 41
- 7** Irondale Furnace and Mountain Brook Trails p. 64
- 18–19** Red Mountain Park p. 137
- 25** Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park p. 191

Best for Kids

- 4** Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces p. 41
- 23** Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge p. 179
- 24** Perry Lakes Park and Barton's Beach p. 185

Best for Scenery

- 14** Oak Mountain State Park: King's Chair Loop p. 116
- 21** Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve: Nature Center to Hawk's View p. 165
- 26–27** Cheaha State Park and vicinity p. 202 and p. 207
- 31–33** The Sipsey Wilderness and Points Northwest p. 229
- 34** Little River Canyon National Preserve: Eberhart Trail p. 256

Best for Seclusion

- 26 Cheaha-Cave Creek-Pinhoti Trail Loop p. 202

Best for Waterfalls

- 9 Turkey Creek Nature Preserve: Turkey Creek Falls p. 78
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16 Oak Mountain State Park: Peavine Falls p. 126
28 Chinnabee Silent Trail p. 211
32 Hurricane Creek Park p. 240
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- 5 Aldridge Gardens p. 53
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13 Moss Rock Preserve: Waterfall Loop from Sulphur Springs Road p. 105
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Best for Wildlife

- 24 Perry Lakes Park and Barton's Beach in summer p. 185
33 Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in January p. 246





Map Legend

| | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | |
| Directional arrows | Featured trail | Alternate trail |
| | | |
| Freeway | Highway with bridge | Minor road |
| | | |
| Boardwalk | Stairs | Unpaved road |
| | | |
| Railroad | Boardwalk | Border |
| | | |
| Park/forest | Water body | River/creek/ intermittent stream wash |
| | | |
| Amphitheater | General point of interest | Playground |
| | | |
| Bench | Golfing/country club | Primitive camp |
| | | |
| Bridge | Kiosk | Radio tower |
| | | |
| Bus stop | Marsh | Rapids/shoals |
| | | |
| Cabin | Mine/quarry | Restroom |
| | | |
| Camping | Monument | Scenic view |
| | | |
| Cemetery | One-way (road) | Shelter |
| | | |
| Dam | Park office | Trailhead |
| | | |
| Fire tower/ lookout tower | Parking | Viewing platform |
| | | |
| Garden | Peak/hilltop | Waterfall |
| | | |
| Gate | Picnic area | Wheelchair access |
| | | |
| | Picnic shelter | |



Introduction

About This Book

The hikes in this book are arranged geographically and according to major hiking destinations. The **City Center** section contains hikes in and around downtown Birmingham; the **Suburbs** section includes hikes in communities surrounding the central city. **Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve**, **Red Mountain Park**, **Moss Rock Preserve**, and **Oak Mountain State Park** merited sections of their own. Hikes south of the city, down I-59/I-20, take you to the river country, where the mountains fall away to the **Cahaba River**. The eastern attractions are generally reachable via I-20 (with the exception of **Flagg Mountain**, which is south-east down US 280) and take you into the sharper-edged **Talladega Mountains**. Hikes north of the city include the shady shelter coves of the **Sipsey Wilderness**, north of Jasper, and Hurricane Creek Park, near Cullman. To the northeast are attractions along the elevated plateaus of the Appalachians, including **Little River Canyon**.

I chose these hikes because they are easily accessible and offer a good introduction to the diverse landscape and rich history that surround Birmingham. Each has its own particular qualities. Few, if any, would be rated at five stars in all five categories (see “Star Ratings,” page 3). Some have great scenery but would be a slog for kids; others might be extremely convenient and kid-friendly but possibly crowded.

How to Use This Guidebook

The following section walks you through this guidebook’s organization, making it easy and convenient to plan great hikes.

Overview Map, Map Key, and Map Legend

The overview map on page ii shows the primary trailheads for all 35 hikes. The numbers on the overview map pair with the map key on page iii. A legend explaining the map symbols used throughout the book is on the opposite page.

Trail Maps

In addition to the overview map on the inside cover, a detailed map of each hike's route appears with its profile. On each of these maps, symbols indicate the trailhead, the complete route, significant features, facilities, and topographic landmarks such as creeks, overlooks, and peaks.

To produce the highly accurate maps in this book, I used a handheld GPS unit to gather data while hiking each route, then sent that data to Menasha Ridge Press's expert cartographers. Be aware, though, that your GPS device is no substitute for sound, sensible navigation that takes into account the conditions that you observe while hiking.

Further, despite the high quality of the maps in this guidebook, the publisher and I strongly recommend that you always carry an additional map, such as the ones noted in each profile opener's "Maps" listing.

Elevation Profile (diagram)

For trails with significant changes in elevation, the hike descriptions include this graphical element. Entries for fairly flat routes, such the walk around Railroad Park (see page 34), do *not* display an elevation profile. Also, each entry's key information lists the elevation at the start of that specific route to its highest point; some hikes list additional elevations at notable points of interest.

For hike descriptions that include an elevation profile, this diagram represents the rises and falls of the trail as viewed from the side, over the complete distance (in miles) of that trail. On the diagram's vertical axis, or height scale, the number of feet indicated between each tick mark lets you visualize the climb. So that flat hikes don't look steep and vice versa, varying height scales provide an accurate image of each hike's climbing challenge. For example, a hike at at Mount Cheaha might rise to 2,407 feet, while an even more challenging hike at Oak Mountain might top out at 1,200 feet above sea level.

The Hike Profile

Each profile opens with the hike's star ratings, GPS trailhead coordinates, and other key at-a-glance information—from the trail's distance and configuration to phone numbers and websites. Each profile also includes a map (see "Trail Maps," above). The main text for each profile includes four sections: Overview, Route Details, Nearby Attractions (where applicable), and Directions (for getting to the trailhead area).

Star Ratings

Here's how they break down for the following five categories:

SCENERY:

| | |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| ★★★★★ | Unique, picturesque panoramas |
| ★★★★ | Diverse vistas |
| ★★★ | Pleasant views |
| ★★ | Unchanging landscape |
| ★ | Not selected for scenery |

TRAIL CONDITION:

| | |
|-------|--|
| ★★★★★ | Consistently well maintained |
| ★★★★ | Stable, with no surprises |
| ★★★ | Average terrain to negotiate |
| ★★ | Inconsistent, with good and poor areas |
| ★ | Rocky, overgrown, or often muddy |

CHILDREN:

| | |
|-------|---|
| ★★★★★ | Babes in strollers are welcome |
| ★★★★ | Fun for any kid past the toddler stage |
| ★★★ | Good for young hikers with proven stamina |
| ★★ | Not enjoyable for children |
| ★ | Not advisable for children |

DIFFICULTY:

| | |
|-------|--|
| ★★★★★ | Grueling |
| ★★★★ | Strenuous |
| ★★★ | Moderate: won't beat you up—but you'll know you've been hiking |
| ★★ | Easy, with patches of moderate |
| ★ | Good for a relaxing stroll |

SOLITUDE:

| | |
|-------|--|
| ★★★★★ | Positively tranquil |
| ★★★★ | Spurts of isolation |
| ★★★ | Moderately secluded |
| ★★ | Crowded on weekends and holidays |
| ★ | Steady stream of individuals and/or groups |

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES

As noted in “Trail Maps” (opposite page), I used a handheld GPS unit to obtain geographic data and sent the information to the cartographers at Menasha

Ridge. In the opener for each hike profile, the coordinates—the intersection of latitude (north) and longitude (west)—will orient you from the trailhead. In some cases, you can drive within viewing distance of a trailhead. Other hiking routes require a short walk to the trailhead from a parking area.

This guidebook expresses GPS coordinates in degree–decimal minute format for presenting the latitude and longitude GPS coordinates.

Degree–Decimal Minute Format

N33° 30.983'–W86° 48.862'

The latitude–longitude grid system is likely quite familiar to you, but here's a refresher, pertinent to visualizing the coordinates.

Imaginary lines of latitude—called *parallels* and approximately 69 miles apart from each other—run horizontally around the globe. The equator is established to be 0°, and each parallel is indicated by degrees from the equator: up to 90°N at the North Pole, and down to 90°S at the South Pole.

Imaginary lines of longitude—called *meridians*—run perpendicular to lines of latitude and are likewise indicated by degrees. Starting from 0° at the Prime Meridian in Greenwich, England, they continue to the east and west until they meet 180° later at the International Date Line in the Pacific Ocean. At the equator, longitude lines also are approximately 69 miles apart, but that distance narrows as the meridians converge toward the North and South Poles.

To convert GPS coordinates given in degrees, minutes, and seconds to degrees and decimal minutes, divide the seconds by 60. For more on GPS technology, visit usgs.gov.

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION

Distance indicates the length of the hike round-trip, from start to finish. If the hike description includes options to shorten or extend the hike, those round-trip distances are also factored in here. *Configuration* defines the type of route—for example, an out-and-back (which takes you in and out the same way), a point-to-point (or one-way route), a figure-eight, or a balloon.

HIKING TIME

A speed of 2–3 miles per hour is a general rule for hiking the trails in this book, depending on the terrain and whether you have children with you. That pace typically allows time for taking photos, for dawdling and admiring views, and for alternating stretches of hills and descents. When deciding whether or not to follow a particular trail in this guidebook, consider your own pace, the weather, your general physical condition, and your energy level on a given day.

HIGHLIGHTS

Lists features that draw hikers to the trail: waterfalls, historic sites, and the like.

ELEVATION

In each hike's key information, you will see the elevation (in feet) at the trailhead and another figure for the high (or low) point on the trail; where appropriate, additional elevations are also listed. For routes that involve significant ascents and descents, the hike profile also includes an elevation diagram (see page 2).

ACCESS

Fees or permits required to hike the trail are detailed here; if there are none, that is noted. Trail-access hours are also listed here.

MAPS

Resources for maps, in addition to those in this guidebook, are listed here. As noted earlier, we recommend that you carry more than one map—and that you consult those maps before heading out on the trail in order to resolve any confusion or discrepancy.

FACILITIES

This includes restrooms, phones, water, picnic tables, and other basics at or near the trailhead.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS

Notes paved sections or other areas where one can safely use a wheelchair.

COMMENTS

Here you'll find assorted nuggets of information, such as whether dogs are allowed on the trails.

CONTACTS

Listed here are phone numbers and websites for checking trail conditions and gleanings other day-to-day information.

Overview, Route Details, Nearby Attractions, and Directions

These four elements compose the heart of the hike. "Overview" gives you a quick summary of what to expect on that trail; "Route Details" guides you on the hike, from start to finish; "Nearby Attractions" suggests appealing adjacent sites, such as restaurants, museums, and other trails (note that not every hike profile has these). "Directions" will get you to the trailhead from a well-known road or highway; for some City Center hikes, the nearest cross streets are provided.

Weather

The following chart provides a month-by-month snapshot of the weather in the Birmingham area. For each month, “Hi Temp” shows the average daytime high, “Lo Temp” gives the average nighttime low, and “Rain or Snow” lists the average precipitation.

| MONTH | HI TEMP | LO TEMP | RAIN OR SNOW |
|-----------|---------|---------|--------------------|
| January | 54°F | 33°F | 4.52" (1" of snow) |
| February | 58°F | 36°F | 5.08" |
| March | 66°F | 43°F | 4.96" (1" of snow) |
| April | 74°F | 49°F | 4.11" |
| May | 81°F | 59°F | 4.26" |
| June | 87°F | 67°F | 4.08" |
| July | 90°F | 70°F | 4.62" |
| August | 90°F | 70°F | 3.29" |
| September | 84°F | 63°F | 2.93" |
| October | 75°F | 51°F | 3.12" |
| November | 65°F | 42°F | 4.58" |
| December | 56°F | 35°F | 4.12" |

Source: usclimatedata.com

Water

How much is enough? Well, one simple physiological fact should convince you to err on the side of excess when deciding how much water to pack: a hiker walking steadily in 90°F heat needs about 10 quarts of fluid per day—that’s 2.5 gallons. A good rule of thumb is to hydrate prior to your hike, carry (and drink) 6 ounces of water for every mile you plan to hike, and hydrate again after the hike. For most people, the pleasures of hiking make carrying water a relatively minor price to pay to remain safe and healthy, so pack more water than you anticipate needing, even for short hikes.

If you’re tempted to drink “found water,” do so with extreme caution. Many ponds and lakes you’ll encounter are fairly stagnant, and the water tastes terrible. Drinking such water presents inherent risks for thirsty trekkers. Giardiasis parasites contaminate many water sources and cause the dreaded intestinal

ailment giardiasis, which can last for weeks after onset. For more information, visit cdc.gov/parasites/giardia.

In any case, effective treatment is essential before you use any water source found along the trail. Boiling water for 2–3 minutes is always a safe measure for camping, but day hikers can consider iodine tablets, approved chemical mixes, filtration units rated for giardia, and ultraviolet filtration. Some of these methods (for example, filtration with an added carbon filter) remove bad tastes typical in stagnant water, while others add their own taste. As a precaution, carry a means of water purification in case you ever underestimate your consumption needs.

Clothing

Weather, unexpected trail conditions, fatigue, extended hiking duration, and wrong turns can individually or collectively turn a great outing into a very uncomfortable one at best—and a life-threatening one at worst. Thus, proper attire plays a key role in staying comfortable and, sometimes, in staying alive. Some helpful guidelines:

- ★ Choose silk, wool, or synthetics for maximum comfort in all of your hiking attire—from hats to socks and in between. Cotton is fine if the weather remains dry and stable, but you won't be happy if that material gets wet.
- ★ Always wear a hat, or at least tuck one into your day pack or hitch it to your belt. Hats offer all-weather sun and wind protection as well as warmth if it turns cold.
- ★ Be ready to layer up or down as the day progresses and the mercury rises or falls. Today's outdoor wear makes layering easy, with such designs as jackets that convert to vests and pants with zip-off or button-up legs.
- ★ Mosquitoes, poison ivy, and thorny bushes found along many trails can generate short-term discomfort and long-term agony. When temperatures permit, a light-weight pair of pants and a long-sleeved shirt can go a long way toward protecting you from these pests.
- ★ Wear hiking boots or sturdy hiking sandals with toe protection. Flip-flopping along a paved urban greenway is one thing, but you should never hike a trail in open sandals or casual sneakers. Your bones and arches need support, and your skin needs protection.
- ★ Pair that footwear with good socks. If you prefer not to sheathe your feet when wearing hiking sandals, tuck the socks into your day pack—you may need them if temperatures plummet or if you hit rocky turf and pebbles begin to irritate your feet. And if it's cold and you've lost your gloves, you can use the socks as mittens.

- ★ Don't leave rainwear behind, even if the day dawns clear and sunny. Tuck into your day pack, or tie around your waist, a jacket that's breathable and either water-resistant or waterproof. Investigate different choices at your local outdoor retailer. If you're a frequent hiker, you'll ideally have more than one rainwear weight, material, and style in your closet to protect you in all seasons in your regional climate and hiking microclimates.

Essential Gear

Today you can buy outdoor vests that have up to 20 pockets shaped and sized to carry everything from toothpicks to binoculars. Or, if you don't aspire to feel like a burro, you can neatly stow all of these items in your day pack or backpack. The following list showcases never-hike-without-them items—in alphabetical order, as all are important:

- ★ *Extra food:* trail mix, granola bars, or other high-energy snacks
- ★ *Extra clothes:* raingear; a change of socks; and, depending on the season, a warm hat and gloves
- ★ *Flashlight or headlamp with extra bulb and batteries*
- ★ *Insect repellent:* For some areas and seasons, this is vital.
- ★ *Maps and a high-quality compass:* Even if you know the terrain from previous hikes, don't leave home without these tools. And, as previously noted, bring maps in addition to those in this guidebook, and consult your maps prior to the hike. If you're GPS-savvy, bring that device, too, but don't rely on it as your sole navigational tool—battery life is limited, after all—and be sure to check its accuracy against that of your maps and compass.
- ★ *Pocketknife and/or multitool*
- ★ *Sunscreen:* Check the expiration date on the tube or bottle.
- ★ *Water:* As we've emphasized more than once, bring more than you think you'll drink. Depending on your destination, you may want to bring a container and iodine or a filter for purifying water in case you run out.
- ★ *Whistle:* It could become your best friend in an emergency.
- ★ *Windproof matches and/or a lighter, as well as a fire starter*

First Aid Kit

In addition to the preceding items, those that follow may seem daunting to carry along for a day hike. But any paramedic will tell you that the products listed here—again, in alphabetical order, because all are important—are just

the basics. The reality of hiking is that you can be out for a week of backpacking and acquire only a mosquito bite. Or you can hike for an hour, slip, and suffer a cut or broken bone. Fortunately, the items listed pack into a very small space. You can also buy convenient prepackaged kits at your pharmacy or online.

- ★ Adhesive bandages
- ★ Antibiotic ointment (such as Neosporin)
- ★ Aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ibuprofen (Advil)
- ★ Athletic tape
- ★ Blister kit (moleskin or an adhesive variety such as Spenco 2nd Skin)
- ★ Butterfly-closure bandages
- ★ Diphenhydramine (Benadryl), in case of allergic reactions
- ★ Elastic bandages (such as Ace) or joint wraps (such as Spenco)
- ★ Epinephrine in a prefilled syringe (EpiPen), typically by prescription only, for people known to have severe allergic reactions to hiking mishaps such as bee stings
- ★ Gauze (one roll and a half-dozen 4-by-4-inch pads)
- ★ Hydrogen peroxide or iodine

Note: Consider your intended terrain and the number of hikers in your party before you exclude any article listed above. A short stroll may not inspire you to carry a complete kit, but anything beyond that warrants precaution. When hiking alone, you should always be prepared for a medical need. And if you're a twosome or with a group, one or more people in your party should be equipped with first aid material.

General Safety

The following tips may have the familiar ring of your mother's voice:

- ★ *Always let someone know where you'll be hiking and how long you expect to be gone.* It's a good idea to give that person a copy of your route, particularly if you're headed into any isolated area. Let him or her know when you return.
- ★ *Always sign in and out of any trail registers provided.* Don't hesitate to comment on the trail condition if space is provided; that's your opportunity to alert others to any problems you encounter.
- ★ *Don't count on a cell phone for your safety.* Reception may be spotty or nonexistent on the trail, even on an urban walk—especially one embraced by towering trees.

FIVE-STAR TRAILS

- ★ *Always carry food and water, even for a short hike.* And bring more water than you think you'll need. (We can't emphasize this enough.)
- ★ *Ask questions.* Public-land employees are on hand to help. It's a lot easier to solicit advice before a problem occurs, and it will help you avoid a mishap away from civilization when it's too late to amend an error.
- ★ *Stay on designated trails.* Even on the most clearly marked trails, you usually reach a point where you have to stop and consider which direction to head. If you become disoriented, don't panic. As soon as you think you may be off-track, stop, assess your current direction, and then retrace your steps to the point where you went astray. Using a map, a compass, and this book, and keeping in mind what you've passed thus far, reorient yourself, and trust your judgment on which way to continue. If you become absolutely unsure of how to continue, return to your vehicle the way you came in. Should you become completely lost and have no idea how to find the trailhead, remaining in place along the trail and waiting for help is most often the best option for adults, and always the best option for children.
- ★ *Always carry a whistle,* another precaution that we can't overemphasize. It may become a lifesaver if you get lost or hurt.
- ★ *Be especially careful when crossing streams.* Whether you're fording the stream or crossing on a log, make every step count. If you have any doubt about maintaining your balance on a log, ford the stream instead: use a trekking pole or stout stick for balance and face upstream as you cross. If a stream seems too deep to ford, turn back. Whatever is on the other side isn't worth risking your life for.
- ★ *Be careful at overlooks.* While these areas may provide spectacular views, they are potentially hazardous. Stay back from the edge of outcrops, and make absolutely sure of your footing—a misstep can mean a nasty and possibly fatal fall.
- ★ *Standing dead trees and storm-damaged living trees pose a significant hazard to hikers.* These trees may have loose or broken limbs that could fall at any time. While walking beneath trees, and when choosing a spot to rest or enjoy your snack, look up.
- ★ *Know the symptoms of subnormal body temperature, or hypothermia.* Shivering and forgetfulness are the two most common indicators of this stealthy killer. Hypothermia can occur at any elevation, even in the summer, especially when the hiker is wearing lightweight cotton clothing. If symptoms develop, get to shelter, hot liquids, and dry clothes ASAP.
- ★ *Likewise, know the symptoms of heat exhaustion, or hyperthermia.* Lightheadedness and loss of energy are the first two indicators. If you feel these symptoms, find some shade, drink your water, remove as many layers of clothing as practical, and stay put until you cool down. Marching through heat exhaustion leads to heatstroke—which can be deadly. If you should be sweating and you're not, that's the signature warning sign. Your hike is over at that point: heatstroke is

a life-threatening condition that can cause seizures, convulsions, and eventually death. If you or a companion reaches that point, do whatever you can to cool down, and seek medical attention immediately.

- ★ *Most important, take along your brain.* A cool, calculating mind is the single most important asset on the trail. Think before you act. Watch your step. Plan ahead. Avoiding accidents before they happen is the best way to ensure a rewarding and relaxing hike.

Watchwords for Flora and Fauna

Hikers should remain aware of the following concerns regarding plant life and wildlife, described in alphabetical order.

MOSQUITOES

Ward off these pests with insect repellent and/or repellent-impregnated clothing. In some areas, mosquitoes are known to carry the West Nile virus, so all due caution should be taken to avoid their bites.

POISON IVY, OAK, AND SUMAC

Recognizing and avoiding these plants is the most effective way to prevent the painful, itchy rashes associated with them. Poison ivy occurs as a vine or ground cover, 3 leaflets to a leaf; poison oak occurs as either a vine or shrub, also with 3 leaflets; and poison sumac flourishes in swamp-land, each leaf having 7–13 leaflets. Uru-shiol, the oil in the sap of these plants, is responsible for the rash. Within 14 hours of exposure, raised lines and/or blisters will appear on your skin, accompanied by a terrible itch. Try to refrain from scratch-



POISON IVY Photographed by Tom Watson

ing, though, because bacteria under your fingernails can cause an infection. Wash and dry the affected area thoroughly, applying calamine lotion to help dry out the rash. If the itching or blistering is severe, seek medical attention. To keep from spreading the misery to someone else, wash not only any exposed parts of your body but also any oil-contaminated clothes, hiking gear, and pets.



COPPERHEAD Photographed by Creeping Things/Shutterstock

SNAKES

Rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, copperheads, and coral snakes are among the most common venomous snakes in the United States, and their hibernation season is typically October–April. Despite their fearsome reputation, rattlesnakes like to bask in the sun and won't bite unless threatened.

In the Birmingham area, you could encounter any of the snakes listed above, though coral snakes are exceedingly rare.

The snakes you'll most likely see are nonvenomous species and subspecies. The best rule is to leave all snakes alone, give them a wide berth as you hike past, and make sure your hiking companions (including dogs) do the same.

When hiking, stick to well-used trails, and wear over-the-ankle boots and loose-fitting long pants. Don't step or put your hands beyond your range of detailed visibility, and avoid wandering around in the dark. Step *onto* logs and rocks, never *over* them, and be especially careful when climbing rocks. Always avoid walking through dense brush or willow thickets, and be alert crossing creeks—cottonmouths spend much of their time in the water and are territorial.



DEER TICK Photographed by Jim Gathany/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (public domain)

TICKS

These arachnids are often found on brush and tall grass, where they seem to be waiting to hitch a ride on warm-blooded passersby. Adult ticks are most active in April and May and again in October and November. The black-legged (deer) tick is the primary carrier of Lyme disease.

A few precautions: Wear light-colored clothing, which will make it easy for you to spot ticks before they migrate to your skin. When your hike is done, visually check your hair, the back of your neck, your armpits, and your socks. During your posthike shower, take a moment to do a more complete body check. Use tweezers to remove a tick that is already embedded. Treat the bite with disinfectant solution.

Hunting

A number of rules, regulations, and licenses govern Alabama's various hunting types and their related seasons. Though no problems generally arise, hikers may wish to forgo their trips during big-game seasons, when the woods suddenly seem filled with orange and camouflage. Deer-hunting season generally runs from November through January. Turkey hunting takes place in November (in some areas also December and January) and in March and April. Hunters may be pursuing various small-game species from September through the end of February. For more information, visit outdooralabama.com/hunting.



WHITE-TAILED DEER Photographed by
RT Images/Shutterstock

Trail Etiquette

Always treat trails, wildlife, and fellow hikers with respect. Here are some guidelines to remember:

- ★ *Plan ahead* in order to be self-sufficient at all times. For example, carry necessary supplies for changes in weather or other conditions. A well-planned trip brings satisfaction to you and to others.
- ★ *Hike on open trails only.*
- ★ *In seasons or construction areas* where road or trail closures may be a possibility, use the websites or phone numbers listed in the “Contacts” section at the beginning of each trail profile to check conditions before you head out for your hike. And don’t try to circumvent such closures.
- ★ *Avoid trespassing on private land*, and obtain all permits and authorization as required. Also, leave gates as you found them or as directed by signage.
- ★ *Be courteous to other hikers*, bikers, equestrians, and others you encounter on the trails.
- ★ *Never spook wild animals or pets.* An unannounced approach, a sudden movement, or a loud noise startles most critters, and a surprised animal can be dangerous to you, to others, and to itself. Give animals plenty of space.
- ★ *Observe the YIELD signs* around the region’s trailheads and backcountry. Typically they advise hikers to yield to horses, and bikers to yield to both horses and hikers. Observing common courtesy on hills, hikers and bikers yield to any uphill traffic.

FIVE-STAR TRAILS

When encountering mounted riders, hikers can courteously step off the trail, on the downhill side if possible. So that horses can see and hear you, calmly greet their riders before they reach you, and do not dart behind trees. Also resist the urge to pet horses unless you are invited to do so.

- ★ *Stay on the existing trail*, and do not blaze any new trails.
- ★ *Pack out what you pack in, leaving only your footprints*. No one likes to see the trash someone else has left behind. Bring a trash bag with you, and pick up after others when possible.

Tips for Enjoying Hiking in Birmingham

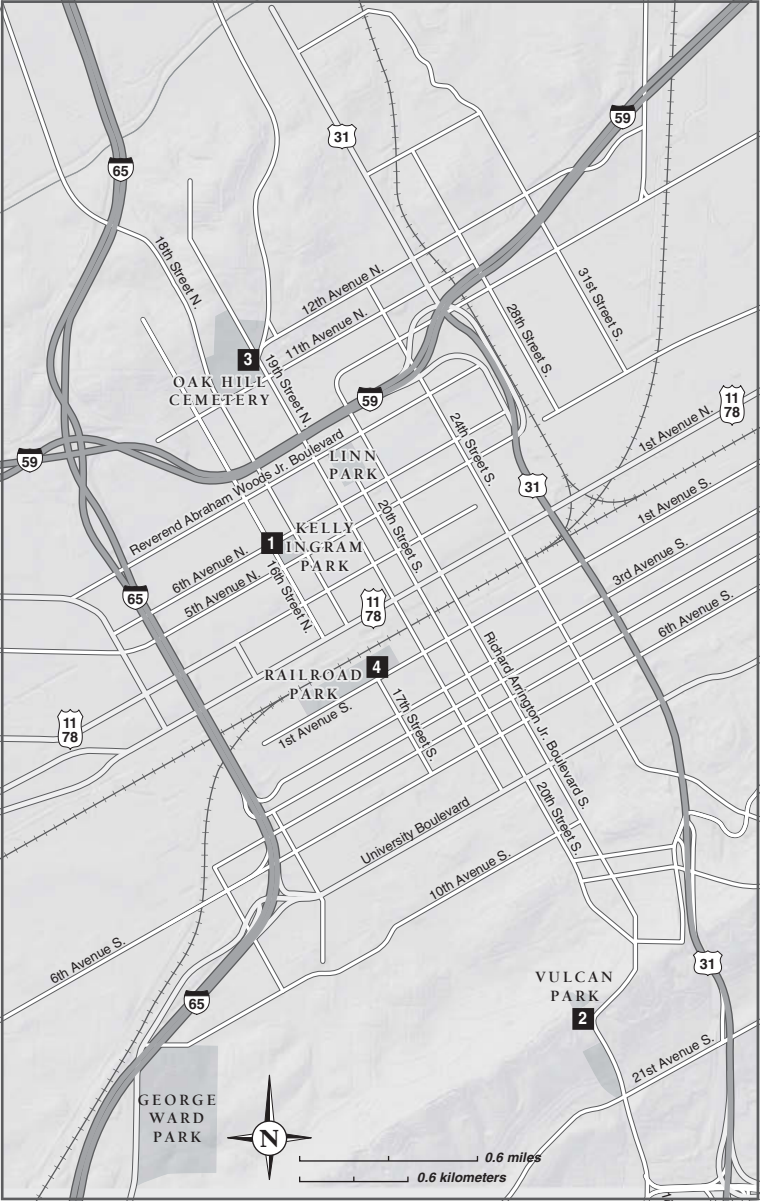
Yes, Birmingham and the surrounding areas can get hot and humid in the summer, but many of these hikes feature waterways where you can cool off. Besides, it's healthy to sweat. Our winters are mild; days after a hard freeze, you'll generally find temperatures in the 50s and 60s. Get out in it, especially since winter-time usually features the best flow in local waterfalls. Fall is glorious, and in the spring wildflowers emerge quickly before the thick canopy closes in. So get out early and often.

LOCATED NEAR HOMEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL, THE HOMEWOOD FOREST PRESERVE TRAIL OFFERS A 1-MILE LOOP THROUGH THE WOODS (SEE HIKE 8, PAGE 71).

**HOMEWOOD FOREST
PRESERVE TRAIL**

Wild Wood
Forest
Trail
100 ft

City Center (Hikes 1–4)





City Center



THE STATUE OF VULCAN IS BIRMINGHAM'S BEST-KNOWN LANDMARK (SEE HIKE 2).

Photographed by Thomas Spencer; used with permission of Vulcan Park and Museum, Birmingham, Alabama

- 1 CIVIL RIGHTS HERITAGE TRAIL: BIRMINGHAM'S WALK TO FREEDOM P. 21**
- 2 KIWANIS VULCAN TRAIL-SOUTHSIDE LOOP P. 28**
- 3 OAK HILL CEMETERY P. 35**
- 4 RAILROAD PARK TO SLOSS FURNACES P. 41**

City Center Overview

FOR A LONG TIME, Birmingham's city center was a place you drove into and out of. There wasn't much living downtown, and there wasn't much walking downtown.

That has changed. Early mornings and late afternoons, you see urbanites not dressed in business attire strolling or striding, pushing strollers, and walking dogs. At 6 p.m. on various evenings through the spring and summer, daytime bankers, nurses, architects, and lawyers wander down to **Railroad Park** for community Crunk, Bootcamp, Zumba, and yoga classes. When the Birmingham Barons are in town, people converge from every direction on the city's minor league baseball stadium, **Regions Field**. At night, cars refill the streets with folks visiting breweries, restaurants, hotels, theaters, and concert venues in downtown and midtown.

In Southside, the **University of Alabama at Birmingham** has been transformed from a commuter college clogged with cars into an urban university, with academic buildings and residence halls clustered around a large, grassy quadrangle, UAB Green. Streets like 10th Avenue South, the northern edge of campus, and 14th Street South, which connects the campus to Railroad Park and downtown, have been modified to be more friendly to pedestrians and cyclists.

Though it is still a work in progress, the city center is becoming a hub of the **Red Rock Ridge & Valley Trail System** (freshwaterlandtrust.org/about-red-rock-trail-system). Administered by the Freshwater Land Trust, the website includes an interactive map of existing trails and a visionary master plan for an entire regional network of trails, bike lanes, and greenways spreading out from downtown to neighborhoods and regional parks beyond.

Trailheads and Trails

On the following pages are four hikes to get you started on your exploration of the city center. The first starts at ground zero for Birmingham's 1963 civil rights confrontation and follows trails that form an outdoor museum complementing the powerful displays inside the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The second takes you through Birmingham's original cemetery, the final resting place of city fathers such as J. W. Sloss, founder of Sloss Furnaces, and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, the fearless preacher who led the charge against segregation. The third journeys from Railroad Park, Birmingham's civic living room, to Sloss

Furnaces, one of the iron furnaces that helped birth the city; it is now a national historic landmark and museum. The final hike is a loop from our iconic cast iron statue, Vulcan, along the rehabilitated and extended Kiwanis Vulcan Trail, down to the UAB campus, over to Five Points South, and back up the mountain.

Other City Center Attractions

ALABAMA PEANUT COMPANY Originally the Peanut Depot, this establishment has been selling fresh-roasted peanuts for more than 100 years. 2016 Morris Ave., 205-538-7422, alabamapeanut.com.

ALABAMA THEATRE A classic movie palace, built in 1927 and lovingly restored to its former glory. Consult the website for concerts and classic movies. 1817 Third Ave. N., 205-252-2262, alabamatheatre.com.

BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM OF ART Has one of the finest permanent collections in the Southeast. 2000 Rev. Abraham Woods Jr. Blvd., 205-254-2565, artsbma.org.

BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY'S LINN-HENLEY RESEARCH LIBRARY Located in Linn Park, next to the courthouse, it's worth a visit just to see the beautiful interior murals of mythological and fairy-tale characters. Research Southern or family history while you're here. 2100 Park Place, 205-226-3600, bplonline.org.

LYRIC FINE ARTS THEATRE An elegant, restored vaudeville theatre originally built in 1914. Designed for acoustics before microphones, it's a great place to experience a concert. 1817 Third Ave. N., 205-252-2262, lyricbham.com.

MCWANE SCIENCE CENTER Interactive exhibits; Alabama dinosaurs, wildlife, and aquatic life; and Imax movies just scratch the surface of what's available at the city's science headquarters. 200 19th St. N., 205-714-8300, mcwane.org.

THE NEGRO SOUTHERN LEAGUE MUSEUM tells the story of African-American baseball in America through the eyes of Birmingham, Alabama. The museum features the largest collection of original Negro League baseball artifacts in the country. 120 16th St. S., adjacent to Regions Field; 205-581-3040; birminghamnslm.org.

PIZITZ FOOD HALL Twelve stalls, including global and American cuisines, pie, and smoothie bowls, as well as a bar. 1821 Second Ave. N., thepizitz.com/food-hall

SIDEWALK FILM CENTER AND CINEMA A two-screen independent theater located on the lower level of the Pizitz Food Hall. 1821 Second Ave. N., 205-324-0888, sidewalkfest.com

SLOSS FURNACES NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK Museum and blast furnaces that were once a center of Birmingham's iron-making industry. 20 32nd St. N., 205-254-2025, slossfurnaces.com.

Contacts and More Information

The nonprofit **City Action Partnership (CAP)**, supported by downtown businesses, provides escorts and guides to downtown. These uniformed ambassadors ride bikes or patrol in vehicles, lending a layer of security and friendliness to the downtown experience. If you need directions or have a dead battery or flat tire, call them at 205-251-0111.

The **Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau** offers a wealth of information on events and attractions downtown and beyond. A smartphone app, maps, and more are available at its website, birminghamal.org.

Comments

Downtown Birmingham is a city, not a gated community. It's beautifully landscaped and generally safe and well kept, but it's not immune to the realities of urban life. Be alert. Lock your car. It's probably best to stay out of the darker, more remote corners after dark. You may encounter homeless individuals, and they may ask for money. Give if you feel inclined, or politely decline and maybe later donate to one of the many ministries that help them find food and housing.



Civil Rights Heritage Trail:

Birmingham's Walk to Freedom



SCENERY: ★★★★★
TRAIL CONDITION: ★★★★★
CHILDREN: ★★★
DIFFICULTY: ★
SOLITUDE: ★★

STATUES IN KELLY INGRAM PARK DEPICT THE FOUR GIRLS KILLED IN THE 1963 BOMBING OF SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH. *Four Girls* sculpture by Elizabeth MacQueen (macqueenfineart.com)

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES: N33° 30.983' W86° 48.862'

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION: 1-mile out-and-back. Additional walking routes branch off this route.

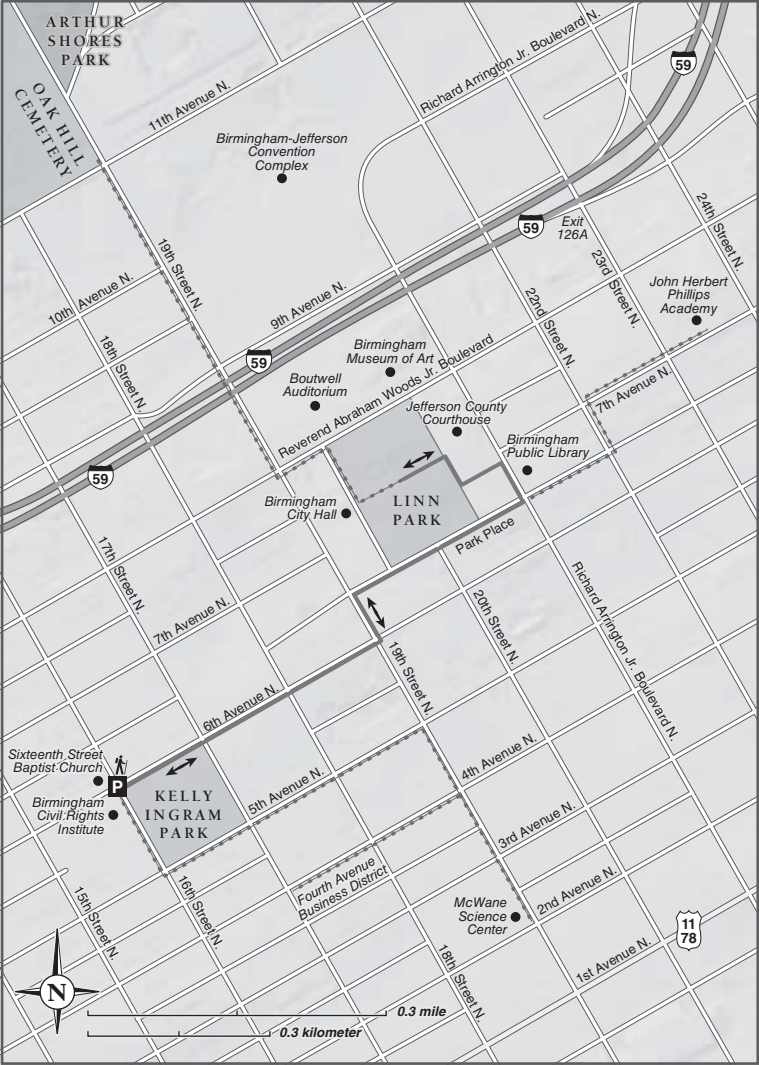
HIKING TIME: You could power-walk the whole thing in less than an hour, but if you slow down and delve into the story, you could spend hours.

HIGHLIGHTS: Walk in the footsteps of men, women, and children who changed the world. See historic sites from the climactic battles of the civil rights movement, such as the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and Kelly Ingram Park. Appreciate the factual information, photos, and inspirational quotes on the signage that guides you through downtown and through history.

ELEVATION: Different routes vary between 591' and 606'.

ACCESS: Kelly Ingram Park and the self-guided street tours are accessible daily during daylight hours. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is open Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sunday, 1–5 p.m.; closed on major holidays. Admission is \$15 adults, with discounts for children, seniors, and others; no admission charge on Sunday or Martin Luther King Day, but donations are appreciated. Individual or group tours of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church are also available. To make reservations, call 205-251-9402; open by appointment only Tuesday–Friday, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.; admission is \$5 students and \$10 adults. Individuals and small groups may visit the sanctuary during operating hours.

Civil Rights Heritage Trail: Birmingham's Walk to Freedom



FACILITIES: The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute has restrooms. Kelly Ingram Park and Linn Park have benches, tables, and green space for picnicking.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

COMMENTS: Kelly Ingram Park, Linn Park, and the more remote areas of downtown are best toured during daylight hours.

CONTACT: Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, 205-328-9696, bcri.org. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, 205-251-9402, 16thstreetbaptist.org.

Overview

During the run-up to and observation of the 50th anniversary of 1963's civil rights confrontations, the City of Birmingham launched the Civil Rights Heritage Trail, an effort to take history to the streets of downtown. There are now multiple self-guided routes through downtown, some featuring audio narration via cell phone. Kelly Ingram Park, the scene of the most famous clashes between protesters and law enforcement, serves as the trailhead for principal tour routes. Adjacent to the park are the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which commemorates the struggle against segregation, and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a staging post for marches and the target of a bombing on September 16, 1963, that killed four Black girls.

Route Details

Marches in 1963 in downtown Birmingham changed American history. The area around Kelly Ingram Park, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and the A. G. Gaston Hotel were established as the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument in 2017 by President Barack Obama. The National Park Service (nps.gov/bicr) and local partners work together to preserve the churches, homes, parks, and streets that saw some of the most notable events of the civil rights struggle.

Famous leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. spoke from the pulpit of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and marched here. Also remembered are the people, both adults and children, who faced down police dogs and fire hoses and paved the way for the ultimate victory over legal segregation.

Start at the corner of 16th Street North and Sixth Avenue North. On one corner stands the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI). Near the entrance is a statue of Fred Shuttlesworth, the leader of the Birmingham movement and an influential figure in the wider struggle. A tour of the BCRI's comprehensive exhibits can easily take up a well-spent afternoon. It will leave you both emotionally exhausted and uplifted.

Across Sixth Avenue to the north is Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, where, in the spring of 1963, marchers rallied before heading out to face the forces of Eugene "Bull" Connor, Birmingham's notorious commissioner of public safety. Later that year, on the morning of Sunday, September 15, 1963, the

church was bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan. Killed in the blast were Denise McNair, 11; Addie Mae Collins, 14; Carole Robertson, 14; and Cynthia Wesley, 14, who were in the church's basement dressing room preparing for the 11 a.m. service. The act of terror shocked the conscience of the nation. The events in Birmingham in 1963 precipitated the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

A statue of the four girls stands across the street at the entrance to Kelly Ingram Park. It's a good place to start your tour of the park. In the 1960s, Birmingham was divided. This area west of downtown was a center of Black-owned businesses. Just blocks away to the east lay centers of white-dominated government and white-owned business and retail.

Urged on by Shuttlesworth, the leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference came to this segregationist stronghold and helped lead the confrontation with Connor, one of segregation's most tenacious defenders.

As the protests swelled and jails filled, Connor formed a perimeter east of the park in an effort to keep protests from reaching City Hall or the retail district. Attempting to corral and disperse the protesters, Connor deployed fire hoses and the police force's canine corps. The images of the snarling dogs and protesters being blasted with water cannons made newspapers and television broadcasts around the country and the world.

Statues in the park memorialize the confrontation, inviting visitors to imagine the courage it took to persist against such aggression. There is a large statue of King, and the flowing water in the fountains recalls his allusion, in his "I Have a Dream" speech, to the words of the prophet Amos: "We will not be satisfied," King said, "until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Look for numbered signs around the park that describe how to access the audio tour by cell phone. From the southwest corner of the park, looking west along Fifth Avenue, you can spot the A. G. Gaston Hotel, which is in the process of being restored. In its heyday, King and other SCLC leaders stayed at the hotel, and it served as their headquarters.

As a side note, Kelly Ingram Park is named for Osmond Kelly Ingram, an Oneonta native who was the first American sailor killed in action in World War I, aboard the USS *Cassin* on October 1, 1917. The park also has a monument to Birmingham native Julius Ellsberry, the first Black Alabama man to

die in World War II; he was killed at Pearl Harbor aboard the USS *Oklahoma* on December 7, 1941.

From the park, you have a choice of two downtown routes for self-guided tours: the **March to Government (Route A)**, which follows the route marchers would have taken toward City Hall, or the **March to Retail (Route B)**, which takes you to the scene of protests in what was once the center of retail shopping in Birmingham. Along the way, you'll pass the former Trailways bus terminal, where the Freedom Riders were beaten by a mob in 1961. On a lighter note, you'll return on Fourth Avenue North, where you'll find a statue of the singing group The Temptations, including Birmingham native Eddie Kendrick. This is part of the Fourth Avenue Business District, historically home to a concentration of businesses catering to the Black community.

Because both routes are marked by highly visible signage that tells pieces of the civil rights story along the way, I won't provide turn-by-turn narration. Each route is about a mile round-trip. As a general tip, on the way out, digest the information on the front of signs and look for cues to tap into the audio tour. Then on the way back, you can read the larger quotes on the back sides of the signs, without having to pause as much. Each sign is numbered and has a small locator map on it, although generally you can spot your next stop by looking around.

The March to Government leaves Kelly Ingram Park and travels east on Sixth Avenue North, turns left (north) on 19th Street North, and then right on Park Place headed toward Linn Park, the Jefferson County Courthouse, and Birmingham City Hall. Note a couple of things not officially on the tour. Until recently, the intersection of Linn Park and 20th Street—the main entrance coming from the downtown business district—was the site of an obelisk devoted to Confederate soldiers and sailors. Erected in 1905, it became a point of contention between the City of Birmingham and the State of Alabama. Birmingham wanted to remove the memorial but was blocked by the state legislature's passage of the 2017 Alabama Memorial Preservation Act. That conflict dragged on in the courts until 2020, when protesters, in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, attempted to take down the monument themselves. The next day, the City began removing the monument, despite incurring a \$25,000 fine for violating the state law.



SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IS ONE OF MANY HISTORIC SITES ON THIS ROUTE.

A small statue of Thomas Jefferson near the entrance to the county courthouse was also briefly targeted by protesters but survived. The conflict was a reminder that the events of 1963 are part of the enduring and ongoing struggle over the story of freedom.

From Linn Park, if you'd like take a longer walk, you can pick up the **March for Education (Route D)**. It begins in the southeast corner of the park by the Birmingham Public Library and travels to John Herbert Phillips Academy. In 1957,

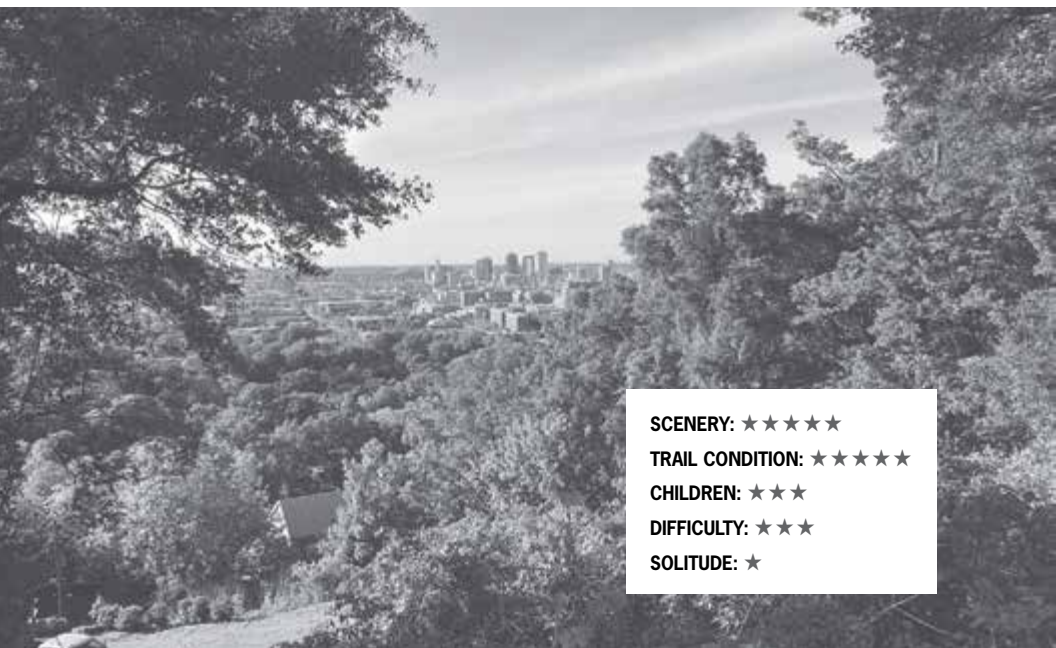
Fred Shuttlesworth led a group of students in an attempt to enroll them and integrate Phillips, then an all-white high school. Shuttlesworth was brutally beaten by a mob in the attempt. Today, Phillips Academy is a pre-K through eighth-grade school in the Birmingham city system.

Departing from the northwest corner of Linn Park is the **March to a Purposeful Life (Route E)**. This route narrates Shuttlesworth's biography. It ends on 19th Street North, north of the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex. Shuttlesworth is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery (see Hike 3, page 35), across the street from the trail's terminus.

Directions

From I-65 North, take the Third Avenue exit and turn right (east). Head east on Third Avenue five blocks, and turn left (north) on 16th Street North. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and Kelly Ingram Park are at the intersection of 16th Street North and Sixth Avenue North. Note that Birmingham streets are laid out in a grid, with streets running north-south and avenues running east-west. The central rail corridor in downtown Birmingham marks the division between north and south. On the north side of the tracks, avenues increase numerically as you go north; streets decrease numerically as you travel from west to east.

Kiwanis Vulcan Trail— Southside Loop



SCENERY: ★★★★★

TRAIL CONDITION: ★★★★★

CHILDREN: ★★★

DIFFICULTY: ★★★

SOLITUDE: ★

VIEW OF THE CITY FROM THE KIWANIS VULCAN TRAIL

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES: N33° 29.556' W86° 47.730'

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION: 4.4-mile out-and-back or 4.1-mile loop

HIKING TIME: Budget half a day for this adventure.

HIGHLIGHTS: Vulcan, the world's largest cast-iron statue; views of the city from Kiwanis Vulcan Trail; the University of Alabama at Birmingham; Five Points South (restaurants, shops, Five Points fountain, and Brother Bryan statue); Cobb Lane

ELEVATION: 911' at trailhead, 610' at lowest point

ACCESS: The grounds of Vulcan Park and Museum and the observation tower are open daily, 10 a.m.–10 p.m. (closed Dec. 24–25; open at 1 p.m. on Thanksgiving and Jan. 1; closed at 6 p.m. on July 4). The museum and gift shop close at 6 p.m. (Note: At press time, they were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions.) Admission is \$6 adults, \$5 seniors age 65 and over and military, and \$4 children ages 5–12. Children age 4 and under are admitted free. After 6 p.m., admission is \$5 adults and children age 13 and over.

MAPS: A street map of Birmingham might come in handy.

FACILITIES: Vulcan Park and Museum has restrooms, picnic tables, and water fountains.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Vulcan Park and the Kiwanis Vulcan Trail are wheelchair accessible. The rest of the route is accessible to the extent that urban environments are accessible. The one stretch that is definitely not accessible is the sidewalk going up Red Mountain along 20th Street South and Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard South: it's barely passable for pedestrians, difficult for anyone walking a bike, and, I would think, out of the question for wheelchairs considering the light and power poles planted in the narrow sidewalk.

COMMENTS: Aside from the final climb back up Red Mountain, this makes a great bike ride. Consider riding and then locking up your bike at the base of the mountain for pickup later. This ride goes through an urban environment, so be prepared for lively, pleasant activity, along with challenges, from traffic to panhandling.

CONTACT: Vulcan Park and Museum, 205-933-1409, visitvulcan.com

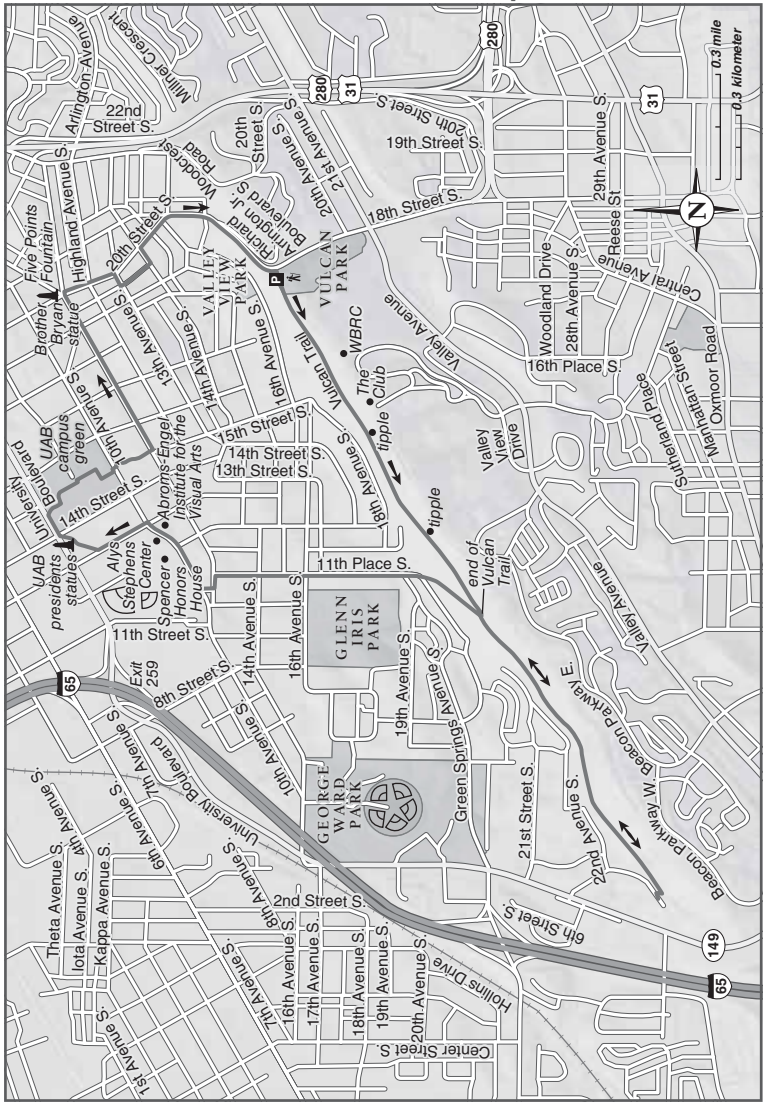
Overview

This hike hits highlights of Birmingham past and future, starting with our landmark, a 56-foot-tall statue of Vulcan, the Roman god of the forge. It's the world's largest cast-iron statue and was erected in tribute to the iron and steel industries that built Birmingham. The hike proceeds along a section of what used to be the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, which once served the mines along the mountainside and is now a paved greenway with views of the city skyline. The walk then descends into the new center of Birmingham's economy, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). After ambling through the campus, we head to the dining and entertainment district at Five Points South and up to quaint Cobb Lane. Finally, we make a steep ascent along 20th Street South back to the trail parking lot.

Route Details

Thanks to a \$6 million project sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham and completed in 2018, Vulcan Park and Museum is now a trailhead for the Red Rock Trail System. Start your day at Vulcan Park's excellent museum and beautiful grounds, ride up the glass elevator to the statue's observation deck, and get a great view of the city. Then descend from the park to the Kiwanis Vulcan Trail, a 2.2-mile walking path that follows what was the bed of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad. This route along the trail and a suggested loop through the UAB campus and Birmingham's Southside can also be pleasant and more quickly accomplished by bicycle. If you want to bike, you'll need to carry your bike from the park down a set of stairs to the trail. Or you can park at a smaller alternative parking lot at the trailhead on Richard Arrington Boulevard South. If using this

Kiwanis Vulcan Trail–Southside Loop



parking lot, approach it by driving up 20th Street/Richard Arrington Boulevard from Five Points South so that you can make a safe right turn into the lot.

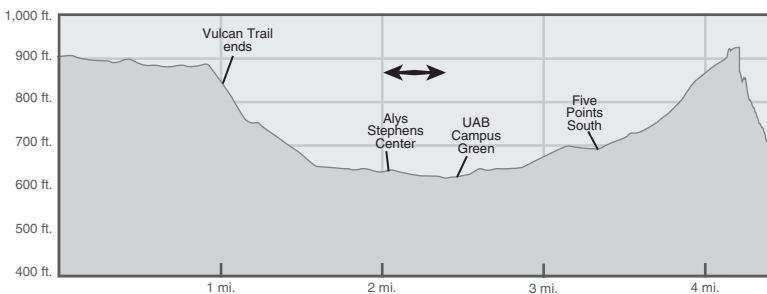
Italian sculptor Giuseppe Moretti was commissioned to create Vulcan for the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. After returning to Birmingham, Vulcan was ingloriously displayed at the Alabama State Fairgrounds until the Kiwanis Club

led a movement to have him placed atop Red Mountain at a park constructed with funding from the Depression-era Works Progress Administration. The statue, the original native sandstone 124-foot pedestal, and the park's grounds were restored at the turn of the 20th century, and an interpretive center and museum were added.

In 2018, the north side of Vulcan Park was rehabilitated and transformed into Kiwanis Centennial Park. Along with adding a new plaza, fountain, and new lighting for Vulcan, the project restored access to the opening of the Lone Pine Mine. You can now peer into the shaft that followed the ore seam deep down into the mountain. The Kiwanis project also connected the park to Vulcan Trail, which follows the bed of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, the railroad network that picked up ore at this mine and numerous others from Ruffner Mountain to Bessemer.

When you've descended to the trail, first look east, to where Richard Arrington Boulevard passes over the mountain. This cut in the mountain passed under the Birmingham Mineral Railroad through Lone Pine Gap, making way for a streetcar line that connected Birmingham to residential development in Homewood's Edgewood. Later, it was the main route south to Montgomery and Florida, making Vulcan a prime stop for tourists.

Proceed west on this smooth paved surface. Almost immediately, you'll notice cut rock and tumbled collections of boulders, some of which have that rusty red color, or oxidized iron ore. Establishing and maintaining this trail has been harder than one might think. A century of mining has left the mountain something short of stable. Its mining history also explains the kudzu covering these slopes. Kudzu was promoted as an excellent erosion preventer and was



often planted at former mine sites to stabilize the hillsides. This was in the days before companies were required to reclaim the disturbed land.

Looking up the kudzu-covered mountain slope, you'll see two of the local television stations, WVTM (NBC 13) and WBRC (Fox 6), high atop the mountain. WBRC has a distinctive red neon sign. (The last three call letters stand for Bell Radio Corporation; J. C. Bell founded the station's radio predecessor in the 1920s.) Also perched on the mountain is The Club, a swanky jet-age members-only supper club famous for dining, dancing, and views of the city.

The Kiwanis Vulcan Trail also offers great views of the city and beyond. Turn your attention to the valley below for wide-open views of UAB and the city skyline. On a clear day, you can see on the northwestern horizon the steam rising from Alabama Power's Miller Electric Generating Plant. The trail is a heck of a place to catch a sunset, but it isn't lighted, so I wouldn't linger.

Just past The Club you'll see the base of what was an ore crusher, one of two along this stretch. This concrete crusher was part of a system that brought ore by tram from the shaft located on the Homewood side of the mountain over to the railroad.

As you proceed farther west, the kudzu ends and a more natural forest, including oakleaf hydrangea, begins. The trail becomes more shaded while still offering glimpses of downtown. At 1.2 miles, the trail reaches an intersection. A gated paved road leads up the mountain to the Water Works tanks and to the right, down the steep paved decline, is a connection to 11th Place South in the Southside neighborhood and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The trail becomes a fine gravel path here, a shaded walk that continues another mile almost all the way to Green Springs Highway, a total distance of 2 miles from Vulcan Park. This extension, which continues to follow the Birmingham Mineral Railroad bed, was part of the Kiwanis project. It is sublime. The shade is deeper and the forest thicker. I complain about privet, an invasive ornamental shrub, but in late April when I hiked the trail, it was blooming, perfuming the corridor.

If you want a quiet out-and-back experience, follow the extension to its terminus and return for a round-trip of 4.4 miles. If you're up for a more urban experience, turn right and proceed downhill to 11th Place South, through a funky neighborhood of older homes. Some have been restored and look great,

and others are occupied by college students. Coming down this street, there is a great moment when the city skyline comes into view.

After you pass Glen Iris Elementary School, follow the road as it curves to a stoplight at 10th Avenue South. Take a right there or, if you choose, use the crosswalk to cross to the opposite side of the street and onto the UAB campus.

Proceed east on 10th Avenue, and on your right you'll see what used to be Second Presbyterian Church but is now the home of UAB's honors program, the Spencer Honors House (no relation to me).

Just beyond that is the Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center, a venue for concerts and plays. Across the street the architecturally innovative Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts features art galleries that are open weekdays, 10 a.m.–6 p.m., and Saturday, noon–6 p.m.

At the next corner, at 10th Avenue and 13th Street South, turn left and proceed north on 13th Street to University Boulevard. Cross 13th Street, heading east into a small park planted with live oaks and cherry trees.

Near the easternmost corner of this park are statues of the first three presidents of UAB: Joseph Volker, S. Richardson Hill, and Charles "Scotty" McCallum. Volker arrived at UAB in 1945, when the school was simply an extension of the mother campus in Tuscaloosa. He was the key leader in the rapid development of UAB into a top-tier medical-research university. He became its first president, serving from 1969 to 1976. His statue is flanked by those of his two successors, Hill and McCallum, who carried on Volker's work. Under subsequent presidents, J. Claude Bennett, Ann Reynolds, Carol Garrison, and the current president, Ray Watts, UAB has continued to expand its research base but has also become a more traditional undergraduate college.

That's evident on the next block, where there is now a sprawling campus green, enclosed by the student center, recreation center, dining hall, and classroom and dorm buildings. The centerpiece of the green is UAB's dragon mascot rendered in topiary.

Proceed south through the green back toward Red Mountain, taking in the sights. Cross 10th Avenue South and follow the pedestrian path at the center of the block through the dorms and 11th Avenue South. Here, take a left and proceed east toward 20th Street South. After four blocks, you enter the Five Points South district. You have a multitude of places to eat or drink here,

including Frank Stitt's nationally known fine-dining restaurant Highlands Bar and Grill and its casual cousin, Chez Fonfon. For vegetarians, Golden Temple is a Birmingham institution, and across 11th Avenue South, there's barbecue at Jim 'N Nicks and Thai food at Surin West. I could go on.

Music fans might want to visit Renaissance Records at 2020 11th Ave. S., just past Highlands United Methodist Church. On the way, see the Five Points Fountain and its whimsical statues created by Birmingham sculptor Frank Fleming. On a corner adjacent to the Five Points intersection is a statue of James A. Bryan, pastor of Third Presbyterian Church from 1889 to 1941. Brother Bryan was famous for his tireless ministry to Birmingham's homeless.

Proceed south on 20th Street up the mountain, past additional dining and drinking options. To return to Vulcan, you have to navigate some pretty cruddy sidewalks. It's a steep climb, but there is a great moment at the end, when you've gotten back close to the top and can look out over the city again.

Directions

From University Boulevard and 20th Street, drive south up 20th Street about 1 mile, and look for the signs to Kiwanis Vulcan Trail on the right. If you want to start at Vulcan Park, continue past the trail parking lot and take your next right onto Valley Avenue, immediately taking another sharp right up to Vulcan. From US 280/Rosedale Drive and 18th Street South in Homewood, head north up 18th Street and turn left onto Valley Avenue, then make a quick right up the mountain and into the park. Accessing the trail parking lot coming from the south is not advised, as you would have to make a dangerous left turn into the lot.

Oak Hill Cemetery

SCENERY: ★★★★★

TRAIL CONDITION: ★★★★★

CHILDREN: ★★★

DIFFICULTY: ★

SOLITUDE: ★★★★★



MANY BIRMINGHAM ICONS ARE BURIED IN THIS CEMETERY JUST NORTH OF DOWNTOWN.

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES: N33° 31.547' W86° 48.925'

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION: 0.7-mile loop

HIKING TIME: If you really want to explore, allocate at least an hour.

HIGHLIGHTS: The final resting place of city pioneers, Black and white; lovely statuary; a peaceful atmosphere; beautiful trees; great views of the city skyline

ELEVATION: 615' at start, 705' at peak

ACCESS: Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

MAPS: Available at the cemetery office

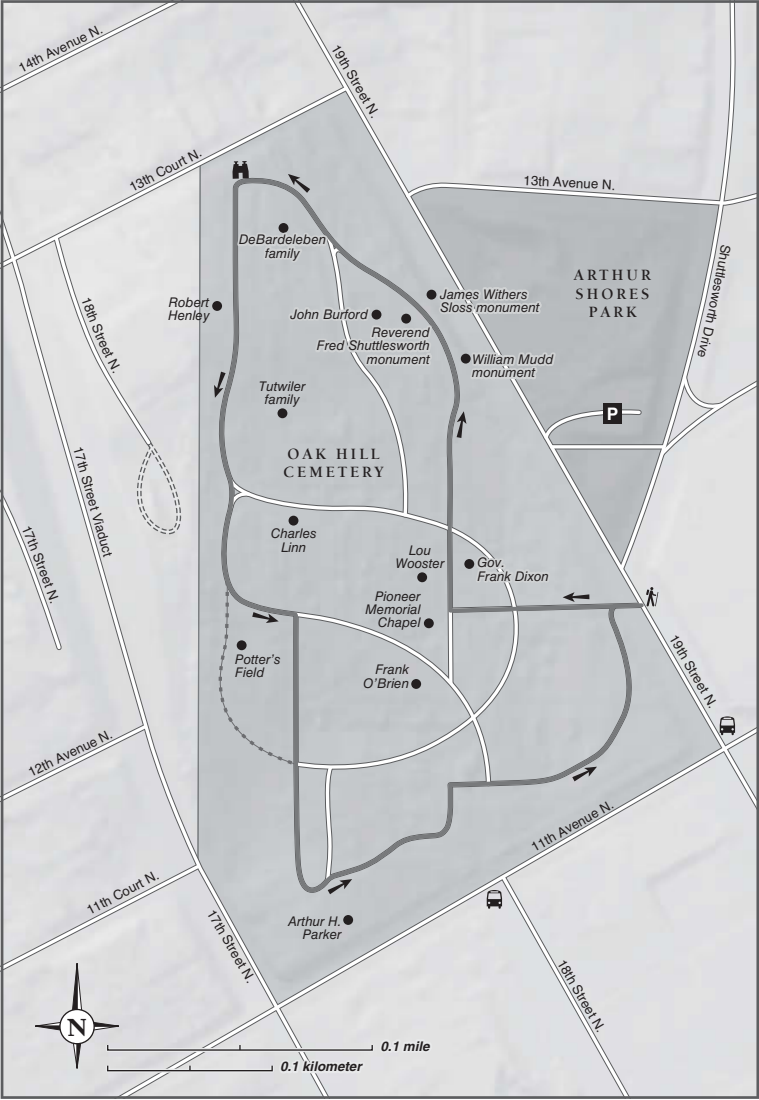
FACILITIES: None

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

COMMENTS: Be respectful. Don't touch the monuments. Pets are allowed on a leash, but you're asked to pick up after them.

CONTACT: Oak Hill Memorial Association, 205-251-6532, oakhillbirmingham.com. The association sponsors seasonal tours.

Oak Hill Cemetery



Overview

Madams and mayors, a soldier of the American Revolution and a leader of the civil rights movement, plantation owners and industrialists, victims of riots and murder and cholera, all resting in peace in a beautiful spot overlooking the

city they shaped. A cemetery may seem an unlikely place for a hike, but you could spend years here gathering the stories waiting to be told.

Route Details

Most people stay out of cemeteries. I frequent this one. I run at lunch with a group of friends, and when we're feeling particularly lively, we loop through Oak Hill, which lies just west of the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.

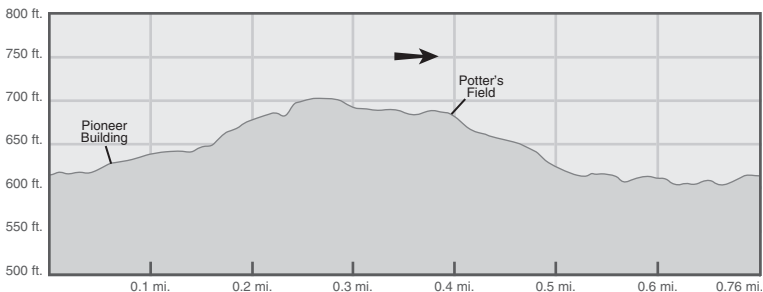
Modern cemeteries are mostly austere and spare places. But Oak Hill, founded in 1871, in the earliest days of the city, is a romantic celebration of death.

Grand monuments and fine statuary, magnolias and oaks grace the winding walkways that mount a hillside that can be a bear to run up on a hot summer day. But once you crest that hill at the northern corner and begin your descent, you're rewarded with one of the best views of the city skyline. It's particularly pretty in the fall, with the leaves in full blaze, dying off for another winter. Those thoughts of mortality are all the more fitting as you're sharing your run with the ghosts of Birmingham past.

Many of the founders of old Birmingham are buried here. One of the most recent additions is a principal founder of the new Birmingham: civil rights icon Fred Shuttlesworth.

It's a place full of juxtapositions, and it always has been. Many of the richest, most influential families are buried here, sharing the earth with the paupers buried without headstones in the cemetery's potter's field. Blacks and whites have been buried here in the same cemetery since its earliest days.

Enter through the gates off 19th Street North and walk toward the Pioneer Memorial Chapel, the Tudor-style building that serves as the offices of the



Oak Hill Memorial Association, the nonprofit organization entrusted with the cemetery's care since 1913.

Start at the steps of that building and turn right, walking uphill. Just a few steps up the path, look to your left and you'll see a stone wall and some graves just above it. Search out the grave of Louise Wooster (1842–1913). Wooster was working as a prostitute in the fledgling city in 1873 when cholera broke out. Half the city's 3,000 residents fled, but "Lou" was among those who stayed behind to nurture the sick and dying. According to legend, Wooster inspired the character Belle Watling in *Gone with the Wind*. (Margaret Mitchell lived briefly in Birmingham before writing the book.) Wooster, who claimed to have had a love affair with Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, went on to operate a notorious brothel across the street from City Hall. It is said that although the respectable men of the town couldn't be seen attending her funeral, their empty, horse-drawn carriages formed a procession through Oak Hill in a show of respect at her passing. Inscribed on her tombstone: DEPARTED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN. For more of the fact and fiction of her life, read *A Woman of the Town* by James Baggett, head of the Department of Archives and Manuscripts at the Birmingham Public Library.

Almost directly across the path from Wooster lies Frank Dixon (1892–1965). Governor of Alabama during the Depression and the Second World War, Dixon was a progressive reformer who aggressively modernized state government. However, after leaving office, Dixon devoted himself to states' rights and rabid resistance to desegregation.

Continue straight, heading north and uphill. Look to the right and you'll see a couple of prominent obelisk-shaped monuments. The first honors William Mudd (1816–1884), a plantation owner and builder of Arlington, Birmingham's only surviving antebellum plantation house. Shortly thereafter and also on the right side of the path is a monument to one of the founders of the post–Civil War industrial South, James Withers Sloss (1820–1890), who, as you might guess, built Sloss Furnaces, the former iron-making plant on First Avenue North right outside of downtown. And directly across the path from Sloss is a black granite memorial to the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth (1922–2011), who more than anyone else deserves credit for leading the city to reinvent itself again. Coincidentally, the leader of Birmingham's civil rights movement grew up in Oxmoor Valley,

not far from Birmingham's first iron ore mines and blast furnace. And maybe it's just another coincidence that the grave of John Burford (1758–1834), a veteran of the American War for Independence, was reinterred at Oak Hill in 1905.

Continuing up the hill, on your left you'll see the DeBardeleben family plot, where Henry F. DeBardeleben (1840–1910) and his wife, Ellen Pratt DeBardeleben (1844–1894), are buried. Ellen was the daughter of Daniel Pratt, considered Alabama's first industrialist, and Henry was a key player in launching Birmingham's industrial rise.

Rounding the crest of the cemetery hill and descending, you catch that view of the city I mentioned. To the left down the hill, in the shade of some of the cemetery's prettiest trees, is the Tutwiler family plot, a name associated with both the past of mining and industry and the development of downtown, including the Tutwiler Hotel, which was Birmingham's landmark hotel until its demolition in the 1970s. A former apartment building, also built by the Tutwilers, was later rechristened as the Tutwiler Hotel and still operates today.

As you come to an intersection with a path coming up the hill, take a detour down it and look for the mausoleum of banker and industrialist Charles Linn (1814–1882). A plaque on it bears a quote from Linn, made when Birmingham had a population of fewer than 4,000: "Bury me on the high promontory overlooking the city of Birmingham, in which you men profess to have little faith; so that I may walk out on Judgment Day and view the greatest industrial city in the entire South."

Return to the upper path. As you descend the upper ridge, you come to a wide, low open area in the southwest corner of the cemetery. Here lie the unmarked graves of the potter's field. Among those buried here are victims of the cholera epidemic. Also buried here are Emma Hawes (1859–1888) and her two daughters, victims of a grisly murder for which her husband, Richard, was convicted. Before the trial, a mob gathered at the courthouse where Richard Hawes was being held. As the mob advanced on the courthouse and failed to heed warnings to disperse, law-enforcement officers fired into the crowd, killing 10.

At the base of the hill, in the area around 11th Avenue North, you'll find the grave of Arthur H. Parker (1870–1939), the revered principal of Industrial High School for Black students, later renamed Parker High School in his honor. Also in this neighborhood is the grave of William Pettiford (1847–1914), whose

Penny Savings Bank grew to be the largest and strongest African American-owned bank in the United States.

As you circle back toward the entrance, bear in mind that my listing only scratches the surface of the stories hidden here. You'll have to find on your own the graves of Robert Henley, the first mayor of Birmingham, and Frank O'Brien, the first mayor of Greater Birmingham, after the 1910 annexations that doubled the city's population.

Explore on your own. Maps are available at the cemetery office.

Directions

From I-65 North, take Exit 262A (16th Street North) and turn right onto 16th Street North, which soon becomes 18th Street North. In 0.4 mile, turn left onto 13th Court North (just before the Birmingham Water Works Board water tower on the left), then right on 19th Street North. The entrance to Oak Hill Cemetery is on the right at the intersection of F. L. Shuttlesworth Drive, adjacent to the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.

FEATURING 12 VARIETIES OF OAK TREES, THE GROUNDS ARE A GREAT PLACE TO EXPERIENCE BEAUTIFUL FALL COLOR.



Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces

SCENERY: ★★★★★

TRAIL CONDITION:

★★★★★

CHILDREN: ★★★★★

DIFFICULTY: ★

SOLITUDE: ★

THE CITY SKYLINE IS IN VIEW FROM A RAILROAD PARK WATER FEATURE.

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES: N33° 30.611' W86° 48.506'

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION: 5.2-mile loop

HIKING TIME: 30 minutes

HIGHLIGHTS: Open, urban hub for exercise and play; diverse and beautiful; mostly native landscaping; ponds and flowing creeks; 360-degree views of the skyline; city history exhibit; the motion, sound, and visual variety provided by passing trains

ELEVATION: 600'–615'

ACCESS: Daily, 7 a.m.–11 p.m.

MAPS: Available at the website below

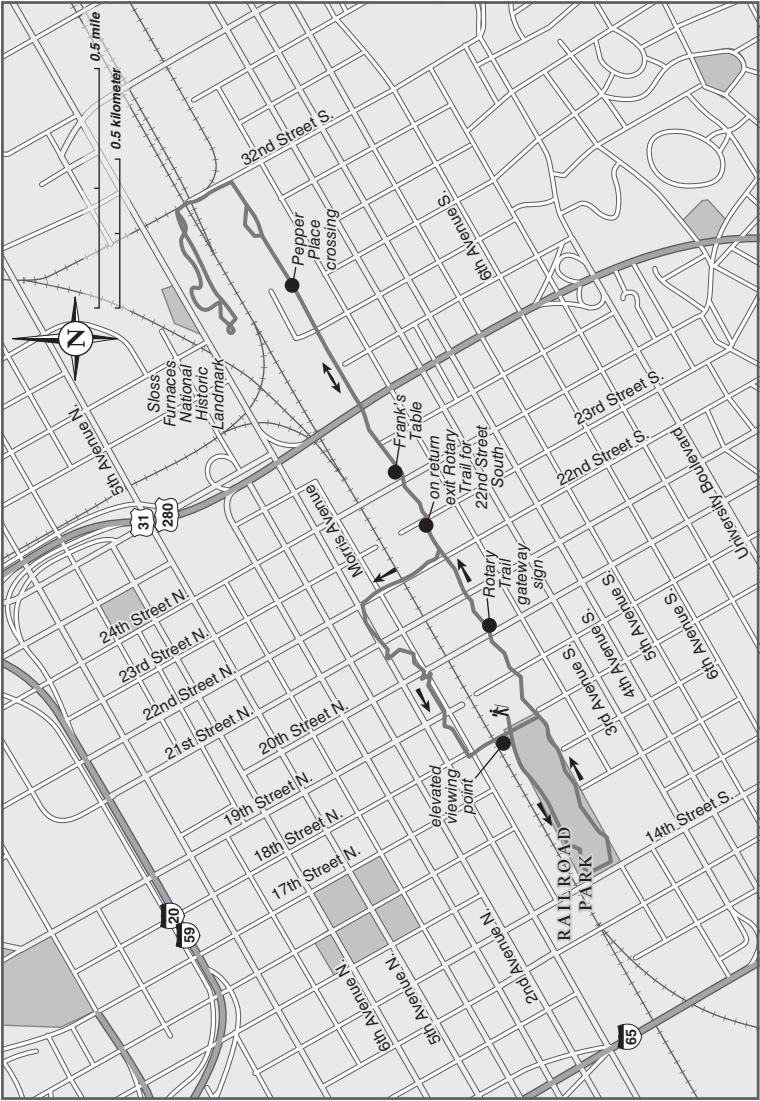
FACILITIES: Restrooms, concession stand, bike racks, picnic table, benches, playgrounds, exercise area, skateboard bowls, amphitheater

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

COMMENTS: Pets welcome but must be under control and on a leash at all times, and you need to clean up after them. Bikers, skaters, and skateboarders are allowed but are asked to use the central paved corridor. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the park.

CONTACT: 205-521-9933, railroadpark.org

Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces



Overview

This hike connects Railroad Park, ground zero for the new Birmingham, with Sloss Furnaces, one of the iron ore blast furnaces that helped birth the city

and now a museum and National Historic Landmark. They are connected by the Rotary Trail, an abandoned rail corridor that was repurposed as a walking path.

It's fitting. Birmingham is a recycled and resurgent city. No place exemplifies that better than Railroad Park, which encompasses four city blocks, 19 acres, with ponds; streams; and native trees, flowers, and grasses. There are wide-open meadows and undulating hills. In the fall, hillsides of muhly grass turn a blazing pink, and in the summer, a profusion of flowers blooms. There are playgrounds and exercise equipment, dining on the plaza, and a grassy amphitheater for concerts. Elevated walkways allow you to survey the city center in every direction: the downtown skyline; trains rolling through town; the city's new ballpark, Regions Field; the towers of Children's Hospital; the University of Alabama at Birmingham's medical complex and college campus; and Vulcan, atop Red Mountain.

Meanwhile, Sloss Furnaces tells the story of the rise of the city and the iron and steel industries. Once the largest manufacturer of pig iron in the world, the furnaces operated from 1882 to 1970 making it the longest continuously running blast furnace in Birmingham's history. The shutdown of Sloss was a milestone in the long, slow decline of the industry in Birmingham. And when the structures were saved and reopened in the early 1980s as a historic site and venue for concerts, festivals, and conferences, it was an early step in the reimagining of the Magic City.

Route Details

When the 21st century dawned, the four blocks that now make up Railroad Park were a forlorn, weed-choked lot that had once been a railroad freight yard. To the north, the office-oriented downtown was beginning to add more restaurants and living spaces. To the south, the medical and university district was seeing constant construction of new buildings and housing. The gathering momentum gave energy to an idea that had been dreamed about for decades: take that neglected no-man's-land south of the downtown rail corridor and turn it into a ribbon of green running through the heart of the city. Create a place to play, to wander, to gather; a place for outdoor concerts and festivals; a place to exercise or relax.

Most older major cities grew up along rivers, and revitalization efforts have tended to center along their waterfronts, but Birmingham's river was the railroads. So we turned to the tracks.

The construction of the park was a partnership of many players, public and private. The nonprofit Railroad Park Foundation and the City of Birmingham led the way, with support from Jefferson County, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, and a multitude of other donors. The park cost \$23 million to build and opened in 2010 to immediate success, followed by a long list of awards and recognitions. It spurred the construction of Regions Field across First Avenue South from the park, and it has inspired residential projects in the area and the development of greenways and trails spreading out from the park in every direction.

Start your walk at the 17th Street Plaza, north of the intersection of 17th Street South and First Avenue South. This plaza serves as the main hub of the park, where you can find the park headquarters, restrooms, and a concession area.

From the plaza, proceed east, uphill on the asphalt walkway that ascends the southern edge of the big grassy bowl. You're walking parallel to First Avenue South. As you climb this hill, it's a good moment to observe how the park's designers reshaped the landscape for both aesthetic and functional purposes. Before the park, this was a flat plain, the lowest point in the city. It was bounded to the north by a tall, unsightly wall rising to the railroad corridor.

During the construction process, the land was reconfigured to form this amphitheater to host concerts and movies. Ponds were dug out and earth was piled up to create a hillside along the northern edge of the park. That landscaped hillside now hides the viaduct wall, and its upper ridge carries an elevated walkway from which you can view the city, the park, and the rail corridor.

The park's hillsides, planted with native grasses, flowers, and trees, slope down to the water features that collect stormwater and recirculate it through the park. A wetland marsh of cattails and aquatic grasses and flowers at the eastern end of the park serves as a biofiltration system. The collected water is supplemented with water drawn from on-site wells and is used to irrigate the park. The park's four square blocks have been sculpted into a microcosm of the region, with its valleys, ridges, creeks, and wetlands.

Looking back to the park, you can pick out the subtle ways designers used native elements in creating the landscape: brick made from our red-clay soils, limestone collected in metal cages to form much of the bench seating. Steel bridges and structures suggest our steel industry. The buildings on the plaza call to mind railroad boxcars. A lap around the park is three-quarters of a mile. Take one now or later, taking in the views of downtown; the Medical District and UAB; and Vulcan atop Red Mountain, in the green distance. Along the way, you'll see Regions Field, home of Birmingham's minor league baseball team, the Barons (originally the Coal Barons). The field and its surrounding apartment buildings and restaurants were drawn to the area after the successful completion of the park.

When you're ready, descend from the top of the amphitheater knoll, down the brick staircase toward the corner of 18th Street South and First Avenue South. Along this staircase is a timeline display of the city's history. Explore it, but be careful not to get so wrapped up in the story that you stumble down the steps.

Proceed to the corner of First Avenue and 18th Street South, cross 18th, and proceed east along First Avenue. Visible to your left, abutting the railroad corridor, is a redbrick building with smokestacks rising from it. This was originally a small coal-fired power plant. As late as the 1990s, it burned coal to produce steam that would then travel in pipes to downtown buildings, providing heat for radiators. Originally, the plant was the power source for Birmingham's electric streetcar system, which at one point was the most extensive in the Southeast. As I write in 2020, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant is a central element in a planned mixed-use development extending the public-space elements of Railroad Park to a new entertainment, living, and dining district.

Proceeding along First Avenue and after crossing 19th Street, you'll notice a building on your left that was a railroad depot. This is your first hint that you are indeed on the right track toward the Rotary Trail, which was built along an abandoned Seaboard Air Line Railroad line.

Next, looking ahead, across 20th Street, you should be able to spy a 46-foot-tall ROTARY TRAIL IN THE MAGIC CITY sign at the trail entrance. Erected in 2016, the sign is a scaled-down replica of the BIRMINGHAM THE MAGIC CITY sign that once stood outside Birmingham's main train station,

Terminal Station. In the great age of rails, the sign was Birmingham's welcome mat. In the new age of trails, this is ours, marking the eastbound trailhead of the Rotary Trail and the Jones Valley Trail Corridor. Trail proponents are working to extend this greenway system through Birmingham's eastern neighborhoods all the way to Ruffner Mountain and the public nature preserve atop its ridge.

Cross 20th Street and, watching for traffic, navigate to the entrance of the Rotary Trail, which follows the sunken cut where the rails once ran. The multimillion-dollar project to create this four-block linear park was funded by the City of Birmingham and the Rotary Club of Birmingham. Begun in 2013, the club's 100th anniversary, the Rotary Trail, like Railroad Park, addressed a long-standing eyesore in what was a neglected downtown corridor. Like Railroad Park, the completion of the Rotary Trail has spurred revitalization and new construction along First Avenue South. Prior to its construction, the cut was a canyon of weeds, and its only use was as a refuge for the homeless.

You might have heard of The High Line in New York City, a project that converted an elevated railway into a botanically and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian corridor. This project is similar, except it is sunken. The low-lying nature of the Rotary Trail presented some challenges: stormwater collects in the canyon. But thanks to a carefully designed drainage system, the water is collected and filtered through a series of swales reminiscent of natural creekbeds before making its way to storm sewers. The path wanders through the corridor like a creek, with flowers and other plantings along the banks. The sunken cut also required creative solutions for accessing the trail from surrounding streets. Those come in the form of steel ramps and staircases at each intersection.

At the eastern end of the trail, you return to street level, and before leaving the trail you can stop at *Frank's Table*, a monumental but welcoming set of table and chairs honoring Birmingham's premier restaurateur, Frank Stitt, owner and chef of the James Beard Award-winning restaurant Highlands Bar & Grill. The table is topped with a thick disc of polished Alabama marble, and at its center rises a tall, bright, and light stainless-steel sculpture of a bee's wing. The tall chairbacks echo the wing's design. As of 2020, this table set for artistic thinking may seem out of place, as it is adjacent to an underpass and in a transitioning part of town. It calls to mind another risk taken. When Stitt opened his white-tablecloth restaurant in Birmingham's Five Points South neighborhood

in 1982, it was a brave and unlikely spot for a pinnacle of fine dining. But over time, that's what it became, bringing the area and the city up with it.

Cross First Avenue to the right and follow the sidewalk for a block, past several businesses. At the crosswalk at 25th Street, continue east on a wide asphalt sidewalk that transitions into the Jones Valley Greenway Trail. Plans are underway to extend this trail, which currently stretches about half a mile to 32nd Street, to the Avondale neighborhood. Long-term plans call for the corridor to extend to the 1,100-acre Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve. That would restore a connection between the mountain and the city center, a route along which train cars once moved iron ore. For now, this trail, lined with juvenile trees, passes the headquarters and practice space of the Alabama Ballet and provides a connection to the Pepper Place district, home of shops; restaurants; bars; offices; and, from spring to fall, a crowded and crafty Saturday-morning farmers market. To access Pepper Place, look for the colorful green and blue, riverlike designs painted on the trail, and to the south a gap between warehouses that allows passage into the district at 29th Street South.

Continue on the trail until you reach 32nd Street, and take a left (north), carefully crossing the train tracks toward the looming red tanks and dormant smokestacks of Sloss Furnaces. There are no sidewalks here, so watch your step. Enter Sloss Furnaces through the gate, proceeding along the entry road to the far western end of the complex, where you'll find the visitor center.

Built here at the eastern end of the Railroad Reservation in 1881, Sloss was a cornerstone of the fledgling city of Birmingham, a foundation on which was built the preeminent industrial city of the New South. By World War I, the Sloss company was one of the world's largest producers of pig iron. When the furnaces closed in 1970, they could have been scrapped and torn down, but instead they became an asset to the city. The complex was opened to the public in 1983 as a cultural and historical center.

At the visitor center, you can take in the timeline, a video presentation, and at the right times, a guided tour of the facility. Marvel at the engineering and imagine the hot, hard, and dangerous work of the men that fed the fires and mixed the rocky brew that was cooked into a flowing river of molten ore.

On the way back, Back Forty Beer Company's brewpub is across 32nd Street from Sloss. You can return to Railroad Park by the Jones Valley and

Rotary Trails; however, I'd suggest a diversion. When still at street level on the trail, at 23rd Street South leave the trail and walk along the north sidewalk of First Avenue South until you reach the 22nd Street Viaduct. Take a right, heading north toward downtown. You cross over high above multiple railroad tracks and descend to First Avenue North. Take a left, heading west on First Avenue North; you can continue on First Avenue North all the way to 18th Street. Pause at 20th Street and First Avenue South to take in "The World's Heaviest Corner." When the four steel-framed "skyscrapers" at this corner were built, around 1910, they ranked among the tallest in the South, thus the initial claim of being the heaviest corner in the South. That was later inflated to the claim of being the heaviest corner on Earth. The 10-story Woodward Building, on the southwest corner, and the 16-story Brown-Marx Tower, on the northeast, are built in the Chicago Commercial style, while the more ornate 16-story Empire Building, on the northwest corner, and the 21-story John Hand Building, on the southeast corner, are of the neoclassical style, extravagantly decorated with marble and terra-cotta. The John Hand Building was restored in the late 1990s and in 2014 became the launchpad for Shipt, the Birmingham-based grocery-delivery service. The Empire Building was remodeled and reopened in 2017 as the Elyton Hotel, which includes a restaurant and rooftop bar, if you are interested in a bird's-eye view of the city.

From First Avenue, proceed south one block to Morris Avenue, Birmingham's earliest railside commercial district. To the east, Morris is paved with cobblestone and features restaurants, lofts, offices, and shops, including the Alabama Peanut Company, which has been selling roasted peanuts for over a century. If you are lucky, the original roasters will be in action, perfuming the block with cooking peanuts.

Head west on Morris, turning left on 18th Street to return to Railroad Park, passing Birmingham's train station and bus transit hub on the way.

Nearby Attractions

Regions Field, home of the Birmingham Barons, is at the corner of 14th Street and First Avenue South, right across from the park (205-988-3200, milb.com/birmingham). A related baseball attraction is the **Negro Southern League Museum**,

at 120 16th St. S. The museum explores the history of the Birmingham Black Barons and the historic Black baseball league that operated from 1920 until 1951, featuring legends like Satchel Paige and Willie Mays. (205-581-3040, birminghamnslm.org). Also in the neighborhood, at 114 14th St. S., is **Good People Brewing Company** (205-286-2337, goodpeoplebrewing.com). The taproom is open every afternoon and into the evening. Brewery tours are available on Saturdays, 2–4 p.m. (reservations suggested).

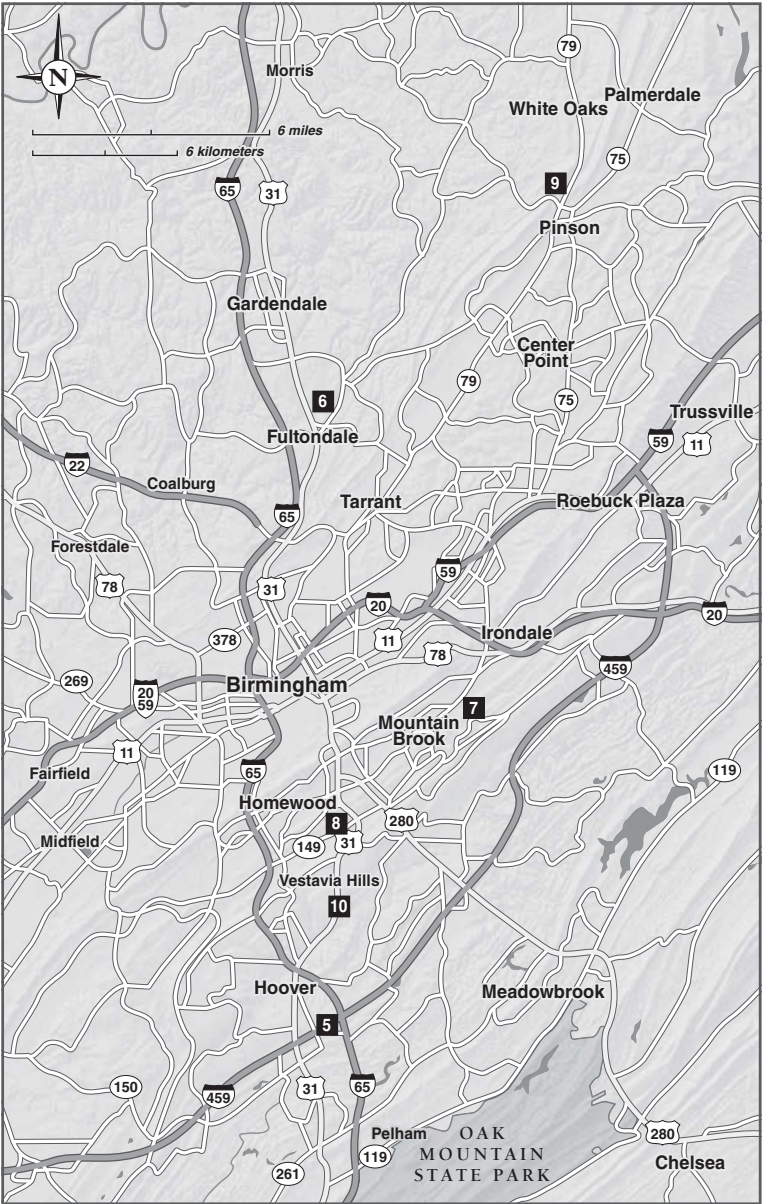
Directions

From I-65 North, take Exit 260B (Third Avenue North), and turn right. Head east on Third Avenue North for three blocks, and turn right onto 14th Street North. Railroad Park is at the corner of 14th Street and First Avenue South. Street parking is available on First Avenue South and the surrounding blocks.

RAILROAD PARK'S CENTRAL CORRIDOR ALLOWS FOR BIKING THE PARK.



Suburbs (Hikes 5–10)





Suburbs



THE ICONIC OLD MILL WAS BUILT BY THE DEVELOPERS OF MOUNTAIN BROOK ON THE SITE WHERE A 19TH-CENTURY MILL HAD BEEN (SEE HIKE 7, PAGE 64).

- 5 ALDRIDGE GARDENS P. 53**
- 6 FIVE MILE CREEK GREENWAY: FULTONDALE'S BLACK CREEK PARK TO GARDENDALE P. 59**
- 7 IRONDALE FURNACE AND MOUNTAIN BROOK TRAILS P. 64**
- 8 SHADES CREEK GREENWAY AND HOMEWOOD FOREST PRESERVE P. 71**
- 9 TURKEY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE: TURKEY CREEK FALLS P. 78**
- 10 VESTAVIA HILLS LIBRARY IN THE FOREST P. 83**

Suburbs Overview

After treating walking as an afterthought in most developments in the second half of the 20th century, the suburbs have rediscovered the importance of including accommodations for pedestrians. **Mountain Brook** led the way in this movement. A greenway built through Jemison Park along Shades Creek and Mountain Brook Parkway brought people out to enjoy that little chunk of woods in the midst of suburbia. That was just the beginning of a movement for greenways and sidewalks that now stretch throughout that city.

Homewood joined in with the construction of the Shades Creek Greenway and the Homewood Forest Preserve. Despite its beautiful but challenging topography, **Vestavia Hills** has been investing in sidewalks. And when it came time to build a new library, they perched it on the edge of the forest, creating a one-stop destination for reading and a walk in the woods.

Meanwhile, Irondale and Trussville have both launched greenway projects along the Cahaba River, and a coalition of communities north of Birmingham is working to develop a long-distance greenway along Five Mile Creek.

With Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve, Oak Mountain State Park, Red Mountain Park, and Moss Rock Preserve, we're lucky to have major go-to venues for hiking, but it has been gratifying to see further development of trails embedded in the fabric of communities. The **Freshwater Land Trust** (freshwater.landtrust.org) led the development of a regional master plan consisting of hundreds of miles of potential trails and sidewalks. If you like the concept of in-town hiking, the **Red Rock Ridge & Valley Trail System** (redrocktrail.org) is a good place to find a project you can support.

Even in built-out urban and suburban environments, it's amazing to see what creativity and community willpower can bring about. All about the region, there are stream corridors, old railroad beds, and utility easements that can be repurposed for trails where there are willing neighbors and a community desire to make it happen.



SCENERY: ★★★★★

TRAIL CONDITION: ★★★★★

CHILDREN: ★★★★★

DIFFICULTY: ★

SOLITUDE: ★★ ★

THE GARDENS FEATURE HYDRANGEAS NATIVE TO ALABAMA, ALONG WITH CAMELLIAS, THE STATE FLOWER.

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES: N33° 23.206' W86° 47.616'

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION: 1-mile loop

HIKING TIME: 1 hour

HIGHLIGHTS: A peaceful pond; tall pines; wandering waterfowl; whimsical statues; magnolias, ferns, and flowers; but most abundantly, hydrangeas—of every kind

ELEVATION: 516' at start, 535' at peak, 483' at low point

ACCESS: Daily, 8 a.m.–7 p.m. (closed on Thanksgiving Day, Dec. 24–25, Jan. 1, and for special events). Admission is free.

MAPS: Available at the entrance gate and the website below

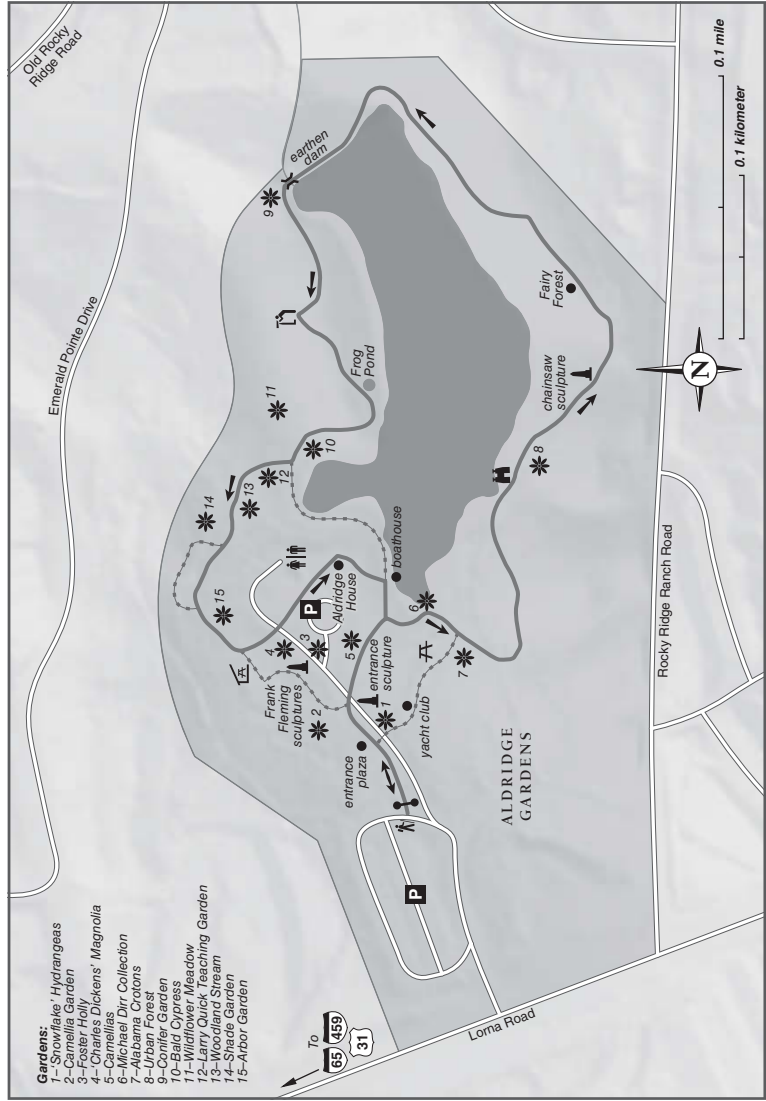
FACILITIES: Restrooms, pavilion, picnic tables, benches, gift shop

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

COMMENTS: No pets allowed

CONTACT: 205-682-8019, aldridgegardens.com

Aldridge Gardens



Overview

Opened in 2002, this 30-acre botanical garden owned by the City of Hoover was once the home of Kay and Eddie Aldridge. Eddie and his father owned a nursery and were particularly renowned for patenting and propagating the

‘Snowflake’ hydrangea, an elegant double-blooming variant of the oakleaf hydrangea. ‘Snowflake’ hydrangeas are plentiful here, along with numerous other hydrangea varieties, as well as a diverse offering of other flowers, trees, and scenery. An easy, scenic hike around the park’s 5-acre lake gives a little dose of piney woodlands, wildflowers, and still waters. Along the way, you’re likely to meet families of ducks and geese. Follow that with an exploration of the house, its sunny landscaped grounds, and a maze of shady gardens nearby.

Route Details

The oakleaf hydrangea was designated Alabama’s state wildflower in 1999, in long overdue recognition of the faithful, hardy decorator of Alabama forests. On many of the hikes in this book, hydrangeas are a key ingredient in the mix that makes a beautiful landscape. At Aldridge Gardens, they take center stage.

Our native hydrangeas are sometimes neglected in favor of the showy pink and blue French hydrangeas that are a favorite element in Southern gardening. Eddie Aldridge deserves much credit for putting our native hydrangeas on the equal footing they should enjoy. Long before the modern native-plant craze, Aldridge celebrated the oakleaf, which loves shade and moist soil but can withstand heat and drought.

In its typical form, the oakleaf is subtly beautiful, with its fresh green growth in spring, its clouds of creamy white blooms in early summer, and its rusty red coloring in the fall. Aldridge popularized a variant of the oakleaf, the ‘Snowflake,’ which in effect has double the blooms of a normal oakleaf. The original plant was found in the wild around Turkey Creek in Pinson. When a customer brought in a cutting, the Aldridges realized it was special, propagated it, and in 1971 patented it. Eddie is also credited with helping introduce the ‘Harmony’ hydrangea, which was discovered growing on the grounds of Harmony Baptist Church in Attalla. The ‘Harmony’ produces a big, billowing blob of a bloom, packed with thousands of tiny white flowers.

Both varieties are on display in the entrance plaza of the gardens, where this hike begins. The plaza’s focal point is *On the Nature of Building* by sculptor Ted Metz. That urnlike shape hanging from a cable in the center of the sculpture is a plumb bob, a tool used since ancient times that helps builders determine whether what they are building is in vertical alignment. At the base of

that are other instruments used in design, along with a small bird with a twig in its mouth. It's a good place to think about how the garden is a collaboration between nature's creation and the gentle guiding hand of humans.

Branching off to the right of the entrance plaza is a path to a picnic area shaded by tall pines, dogwoods, and magnolias and ringed by an understory of azaleas and French blue hydrangeas. You can immediately set off through the picnic area for a loop around the lake, but to get an initial taste of the garden, I'd advise walking forward a bit. On your left, to the north of the entry plaza, is

QUEEN ANNE'S LACE BLOOMS ALONG THE LAKESIDE.



a collection of camellias. Though it is native to Japan, China, and other Asian countries, *Camellia japonica* became Alabama's state flower in 1960. Give camellias their due: they are beautiful, various, and a staple of Southern gardens. Forty varieties can be found in this collection.

Just beyond the camellia gardens are two sculptures by beloved Birmingham artist Frank Fleming. *Along for the Ride* features a tortoise pulling a cart in which a hare is riding. Nearby, another Fleming-sculpted bunny is *Waiting for My Ride*. You can see more of Fleming's sculptures in the fountain at Five Points South (Hike 2, page 28) and around the grounds of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Fleming's work gets you in the mood to put a little more imagination into the walk you're about to enjoy.

From here, you can get a glimpse of the house and gardens overlooking the lake. Bear right toward the lake, following the path into a low area near the boathouse, and find the path that leads toward the southern shore of the lake. I prefer to make this circuit around the lake before enjoying the more manicured gardens around the house.

Find the sign for the lake trail, which takes you up the ridge a bit before dropping back down to the lakeside. This walk features oakleaf hydrangeas under the canopy of forest with nice views of the green lake below. It must be said that with I-459 just to the north and I-65 just to the east, there's no escaping the muffled rumble of traffic.

You'll reach a trail junction marked by a sculpture of a crowned and bearded king carved with a chainsaw from a tree trunk. You have a choice here of taking the high road through the Fairy Forest or sticking to the low road by the lake. The Fairy Forest features a little natural playground equipped with sticks and stones and pine cones that children use to create miniature landscapes for forest dwellers.

The high trail descends and intersects with the low trail and continues the circuit around the lake by crossing the dam at the far end. It's a nice vantage point and in the summer it's covered with Queen Anne's lace. The trail crosses a bridge over the dam's spillway and continues through a strip of woods between the lake and an open, sunny corridor of low vegetation. Birds are abundant in this borderland and an Eagle Scout-built observation deck provides a nice spot to look and listen.

Continuing around the lake, the path takes you by a lakeside pair of bronze frog sculptures. Ahead is a wildflower meadow, which marks the entrance to a series of gardens to the rear of the house. The shady gardens have more varieties of hydrangeas, plus ferns and hostas. You can usually find a spot to sit alone back here and enjoy the sound of water flowing through an artfully constructed water feature.

The winding path next leads to the arbor garden, a grassy lawn enclosed by a border of native 'Annabelle' hydrangeas, ferns, and azaleas, as well as pines and magnolias. It's a favorite spot for weddings and makes a nice picnic area too.

Arriving back at the house, you can tour its art gallery, which is open on weekdays. Don't forget to come around to the front of the house. In the sunny lawn overlooking the lake, I found a rainbow assortment of daylilies in bloom as well as other colorful ornamentals mixed into a bed at the feet of a St. Francis of Assisi statue. You might want to make a final stop at the boathouse, which has been converted into a covered picnic area.

From that lakefront, looking back at the house and grounds and the surrounding gardens, I felt a real appreciation for the effort and eye that went into sculpting the place and gratitude that Aldridge, Hoover, and a deep bench of volunteers have made available this oasis in the midst of Hoover's rapid growth.

Directions

From I-65 South, take Exit 252 and continue straight onto Lorna Road. Follow Lorna Road 1.8 miles to Aldridge Gardens, at 3530 Lorna Road, on your left after you cross over I-459.

Coming from the other direction, from the intersection of AL 150 and US 31 in Hoover, head northeast on Lorna Road 0.9 mile. The entrance to the gardens will be on your right.



Appendix A: Suggested Reading and Reference

Books

- Duncan, R. Scot. *Southern Wonder: Alabama's Surprising Biodiversity*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013.
- Finch, Bill, and Beth Maynor Young. *Longleaf, Far as the Eye Can See: A New Vision of North America's Richest Forest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Lacefield, Jim. *Lost Worlds in Alabama Rocks: A Guide to the State's Ancient Life and Landscapes*. 2nd ed. Tuscaloosa: Alabama Museum of Natural History, 2013.
- White, Marjorie Longenecker. *The Birmingham District: An Industrial History and Guide*. Birmingham: Birmingham Historical Society, 1981. (See bhistorical.org/publications for additional BHS books).
- Wills, Kenneth, Dr. L. J. Davenport, and Chris Oberholster. *Exploring Wild Alabama: A Guide to the State's Publicly Accessible Natural Areas*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016.
- Young, Beth Maynor, and John C. Hall. *Headwaters: A Journey on Alabama Rivers*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009.

Websites

ALABAMA BIRDING TRAILS

alabamabirdingtrails.com Statewide network of prime bird-watching locations

ALABAMA STATE PARKS

alapark.com Information on Oak Mountain and Cheaha State Parks, which are featured in this book, as well as other state parks, such as Lake Guntersville, Buck's Pocket, and DeSoto

BHAMWIKI

bhamwiki.com Locally maintained wiki focused on Birmingham, from history to current events

BIRMINGHAM MINERAL RAILROAD SIGNS PROJECT

bham-mrr.com History of the local rail network that now provides the backbone for several trail projects

BIRMINGHAM RAILS

bhamrails.info Industrial and railroad history of the Birmingham area

NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALABAMA

fs.usda.gov/alabama Information on the Talladega District of the Talladega National Forest, which contains the Cheaha Wilderness Area, and on the Bankhead National Forest, which contains the Sipsey Wilderness Area

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES IN ALABAMA

fws.gov/refuges Information on Cahaba River, Wheeler, and other National Wildlife Refuges

ONLINE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ALABAMA

encyclopediaofalabama.org Reliably sourced information on history, geography, and a little of everything else

OUTDOOR ALABAMA

outdooralabama.com Official website of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

PINHOTI TRAIL ALLIANCE

pinhotitrailalliance.org Information on hiking on the Pinhoti

ROOTSRATED

rootsrated.com/birmingham-al Locally sourced directory of outdoor recreational opportunities



Appendix B: Outdoor Retailers

ACADEMY SPORTS + OUTDOORS

academy.com

2810 John Hawkins Pkwy.
Hoover, AL 35244
205-403-6145

1612 Gadsden Hwy.
Trussville, AL 35235
205-661-5500

ALABAMA OUTDOORS

alabamaoutdoors.com

3054 Independence Dr.
Homewood, AL 35209
205-870-1919

5467 Patrick Way, #101
Trussville, AL 35235
205-655-6025

108 Inverness Plaza
Birmingham, AL 35242
205-980-3303

DICK'S SPORTING GOODS

dickssportinggoods.com

310 Doug Baker Blvd.
Birmingham, AL 35242
205-747-3121

4401 Creekside Ave.
Hoover, AL 35244
205-909-1400

MARK'S OUTDOOR SPORTS

marksoutdoors.com

1400 Montgomery Hwy.
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216
205-822-2010

MOUNTAIN HIGH OUTFITTERS

mountainhighoutfitters.com

2800 Cahaba Village Plaza, #250
Birmingham, AL 35243
205-970-3300

310 Summit Blvd.
Birmingham, AL 35243
205-298-7890

2000-147A Riverchase Galleria
Hoover, AL 35244
205-985-3215

REI

rei.com/birmingham

335 Summit Blvd.
Birmingham, AL 35243
205-967-1419

SIMMONS SPORTING GOODS

facebook.com/simmonssportinggoods

2001 Second Ave. N.
Bessemer, AL 35020
205-425-4720



Appendix C: Hiking and Outdoor Clubs

BIRMINGHAM ADVENTURE GROUP

[meetup.com/birminghamadventuregroup](https://www.meetup.com/birminghamadventuregroup)

Organizes hiking, kayaking, canoeing, backpacking, camping, and other outdoor excursions

BIRMINGHAM URBAN MOUNTAIN PEDALERS

800-960-9457, [bump.org](https://www.bump.org)

Recreation and service group for Birmingham-area mountain biking enthusiasts

FRESH AIR FAMILY

205-540-6642, [freshairfamily.org](https://www.freshairfamily.org)

Outdoor adventures and education geared to families with children

SOUTHEASTERN OUTINGS

seoutings.blogspot.com

A nonprofit organization that sponsors simple outdoor adventures. All activities are open to the public.



Appendix D: Advocacy and Volunteer Groups

ALABAMA FOREVER WILD LAND TRUST

[alabamaforeverwild.com](https://www.alabamaforeverwild.com)

A program of the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, this land-preservation project protects ecologically and recreationally important lands. Explore properties and get information and directions on the interactive website.

ALABAMA HIKING TRAIL SOCIETY

256-786-0894, [hikealabama.org](https://www.hikealabama.org)

Advocacy for and support and maintenance of trails statewide. Local chapters include one in Birmingham.

FRESHWATER LAND TRUST

[freshwaterlandtrust.org](https://www.freshwaterlandtrust.org)

Develops and maintains open spaces that protect rivers, streams, and endangered freshwater species throughout Alabama. See page 278 for more information.



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About the Author

Photographed by Ivy Spencer



Born in Birmingham, **THOMAS SPENCER** grew up hiking and camping in his native state, and for two decades he crisscrossed Alabama as a reporter for *The Anniston Star* and *The Birmingham News*, specializing in coverage of the outdoors and the environment. During his reporting career, he covered the acquisition of the Walls of Jericho, the protection of endangered species, the development of recreational assets such as the Alabama Scenic River Trail and the Pinhoti Trail, and the movement to expand

green space and trails in the Birmingham metro area. A graduate of the University of Virginia, Tom is now the senior research associate at the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, based at Samford University. An Eagle Scout, he has served as the president of the Cahaba River Society Board of Directors and is a commissioner on the Red Mountain Greenway and Recreational Area Commission.



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Freshwater Land Trust is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is the acquisition and stewardship of lands that enhance water quality and preserve open space. Since 1996, we have worked to acquire, conserve, and connect green spaces that are critical for the protection of rivers and streams and that provide recreational opportunities for the community. Freshwater Land Trust owns and manages more than 7,000 acres in Central Alabama, making it one of the largest owners of private nature preserves in the state. With our partners, we have helped protect over 11,000 acres.

Our organization takes a practical approach to conservation and focuses on building partnerships with the public, private, and government sectors. We work to ensure that everyone wins: landowners, businesses, and communities alike. Our projects include Red Mountain Park, the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership, the Red Rock Trail System, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, Tapawingo Springs, Moss Rock Preserve expansion, Wildwood Preserve in Homewood, Homewood Forest Preserve, and the Cahaba Riverwalk on Grants Mill Road.

Freshwater Land Trust was the first nationally accredited land trust in Alabama, through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Based in Birmingham, FLT is committed to preserving the places that matter in Bibb, Blount, Dallas, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, Tuscaloosa, and Walker Counties. In the past 24 years, not only have we preserved land and enhanced water quality, but we've protected habitats that are critical to endangered freshwater species—many of which are found only in Alabama. These successes have also greatly increased the quality of life for the citizens of our communities by providing additional recreational opportunities.

To find out more, visit **freshwaterlandtrust.org**.



RED MOUNTAIN PARK

Red Mountain Park Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed in 2019 to partner with the Red Mountain Greenway and Recreational Area Commission—a state agency—to operate Red Mountain Park with a mission to connect our communities by reclaiming the land where Birmingham began, uniting us all on the path toward a healthier future.

Red Mountain Park comprises 1,500 acres west of I-65 off Lakeshore Parkway between the Wenonah and Oxmoor communities of Birmingham. The Park offers 15 miles of trails open to walkers, hikers, runners, and mountain bikers. The newly opened northern entrance off Venice Road also serves as a trailhead to the elevated High Ore Line Trail, which runs above the street grid 3.25 miles from the edge of the Park to the Jefferson County Department of Health office in Midfield. The Park is also home to Remy's Dog Park, a fenced 6-acre dog park, and four unique aerial adventures, including the 80-foot Kaul Adventure Tower, a climbing and rappelling tower that is also the base for a 1,000-foot zip line. The Park is also proud to offer the Butler Snow Sensory Trail, a 0.14-mile-long trail designed for both children and adults with developmental differences such as low vision and hearing.

While the last active ore mine on Red Mountain Park property closed in 1962 and remained untouched for nearly 50 years, the Park is covered with the remnants and artifacts of a remarkable mining history that can be seen along most of our trails and attractions. Among the primary goals of Red Mountain Park is to honor the significant contributions to Birmingham's economic and cultural development made by iron and steel workers, their families, and their communities.

To become a member of Red Mountain Park or to contribute to the Red Mountain Park Foundation, visit **redmountainpark.org/support**.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bob Sehlinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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