



# **10 Favorite Historic Hikes in Alabama**

**Joe Cuhaj**

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## Introduction

It all started in the year 2000 when a small publisher, Beachway Press, published the first edition of *Hiking Alabama* (back then it was titled, *Hike America, Alabama*). Since then, thanks to all of you, that book is now in its fourth edition.

The success of that book has allowed me to branch out and explore and write about other aspects of hiking in Alabama including my latest that will be released March 2019, *Best Dog Hikes Alabama*.

The other was a no-brainer – *Hiking through History Alabama*. If you have read any edition of *Hiking Alabama*, you'll notice that there are a few hikes that have an historic component to them. I am a history freak and being able to combine hiking with a visit to an historic site is a dream come true. Then to be able to write about it and share those hikes with you, well, icing on the cake.

For one of my *Holiday 2018 Giveaways* this year, I have put together this little booklet – my *10 Favorite Historic Hikes in Alabama*.

I hope you enjoy it and it helps you get out, hit the trail, and explore Alabama's rich history.

Joe Cuhaj

### 1. Monte Sano Nature Preserve Loop (Huntsville)

- Length: Variable, over 10-miles
- Difficulty: Moderate to difficult
- Highlights: Relive some of the early history of old Huntsville by hiking the Monte Sano Nature Preserve Loop. Along the preserve's trails you will see remnants of the early Huntsville water system on the Waterline Trail, visit an early form of refrigeration for residents of the mountain called the "spring house", and pass an amazing abandoned limestone quarry aptly named Three Caves. All of this, of course, within a beautiful north Alabama landscape.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Late fall to late spring
- Trail Contact: Land Trust of North Alabama, 2707 Artie St. SW, Ste. 6, Huntsville, AL 35805; (256) 534-5263; [www.landtrustnal.org](http://www.landtrustnal.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N34 44.610' / W86 32.640'



## 2. Kinlock Shelter (Bankhead National Forest)

- Length: 1-mile out-and-back
- Difficulty: Moderate
- Highlights: This is a short hike, only a mile long, but the history is astounding. The massive Kinlock Shelter towers above the valley floor. The shelter has been used by Native Americans for centuries as a place of spiritual worship and ceremony. Petroglyphs adorn the walls from ancient times but this is not simply an historic site. The shelter is still used today and therefore it is asked that you visit it with reverence.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Fall & spring; No fees
- Special Note: The shelter is an historic monument. Treat it with reverence – do not deface the walls and of course, practice leave no trace.
- Trail Contact: Bankhead National Forest, 1070 Hwy 33, Double Springs, AL 35553; (205) 489-5111; [www.fs.fed.us/](http://www.fs.fed.us/)
- Trailhead GPS: N34 18.797' / W-87 30.525'



### 3. Cave Mountain Loop (Guntersville)

- Length: 1.4-mile lollipop loop
- Difficulty: Moderate to difficult
- Highlights: Cave Mountain's namesake stands wide open facing a beautiful wetland. The cave was once the site of salt peter mining operations during the Civil War.
- Seasons / Fees: Year round; No fee

Special Note: You can enter the first 100 to 150 feet; after that special permits are required and you must be an experienced caver. While this cave has been "bat free" for some time, the cave itself could harbor white nose syndrome, a dangerous virus to bats. It is not harmful to humans but it is to bats so a person walking in an infected cave then visiting another cave with bats in it could contaminate the colony.

- Trail Contact: Tennessee Valley Authority Reservation, PO Box 1010, Muscle Shoals, AL 35662; (256) 386-2601; [www.tva.gov](http://www.tva.gov)
- Trailhead GPS: N34 25.116' / W86 24.276'



#### 4. Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve (Birmingham)

- Length: 4.6-mile loop
- Difficulty: Moderate with a few steep climbs
- Highlights: Ruffner Mountain was once a major player in the iron and steel history of Birmingham. Today, the mountain is a beautiful nature preserve in the heart of the city with miles of trail to explore. This 4.6-mile hike will take you back in time to the old limestone quarry with its massive rock walls, a long since abandoned mine, a giant iron ore crusher, and spectacular views as you meander through the shade of a rich, dense forest canopy.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Winter to late spring; No fee
- Trail Contact: Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, 1214 81<sup>st</sup> St., Birmingham; (205) 833-8264; [ruffnermount.org](http://ruffnermount.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N33 33.518' / W86 42.427'



## 5. Red Mountain Park (Hoover)

- Length: 5.4-mile loop
- Difficulty: Moderate to difficult
- Highlights: Another fascinating hike through Birmingham's glory days as an iron giant, the Ike Maston / BMMR Loop climbs up ridges and leads you to the beautiful mission style architecture of the Redding Shaft Mine and Hoist House then follows a section of the old BMRR (Birmingham Mineral Railroad) back to the trailhead.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Year round; No fee
- Trail Contact: Red Mountain Park, 277 Lyon Ln., Birmingham, AL 35211; (205) 202-6043; [www.redmountainpark.org](http://www.redmountainpark.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N33 26.747', W86 51.735'



## 6. Smith Mountain Loop

- Length: 0.9-mile loop
- Difficulty: Moderate
- Highlights: Smith Mountain stands high above the banks of Lake Martin. The Smith Mountain Trail winds its way up the craggy mountain offering breathtaking panoramic views of the lake itself and culminates at the summit at the old Alabama Forestry Commission fire tower that was manned from 1939 to 1980. The tower has since been completely restored and can be climbed for an even better view.
- Best Seasons / Fees: September – May; No fee
- Trail Contact: Cherokee Ridge Alpine Trail Association, PO Box 240503, Eclectic, AL 36024; [www.cherokeeridgealpinetrail.org](http://www.cherokeeridgealpinetrail.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N32 48.692' / W85 50.119'



## 7. Flagg Mountain (Weogufka)

- Length: Variable, over 5-miles
- Difficulty: Moderate
- Highlights: Time has virtually stood still atop Flagg Mountain. The trails around the mountain takes you through a mixed pine and hardwood forest that radiates color in the fall, falls silent with a blanket of snow in winter, and provides a cooling canopy in the summer. These trails pass a spring, CCC cabins that were built in 1935 (and that have been renovated and can now be reserved for up to 3 days/2 nights for a small donation to help preserve the site), and the amazing stone work of the CCC Flagg Mountain fire tower. There is also plenty of space for primitive tent camping.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Year round; No fee
- Trail Contact: Alabama Hiking Trail Society, PO Box 235, Rockford 35136; [hikealabama.org](http://hikealabama.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N32 59.084', W86 21.274'



## 8. Mound Island (Mobile)

- Length: 1.1-mile out-and-back
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Venture into the dark wilderness of the second largest river delta in the country on the Mound Island hike. Alligators and wild boar lurk about on the island and the nearby waterline as you hike the rain-forest like trail to ancient Indian mounds over a thousand years old.
- Best Seasons / Fees: September – early May; No Fee
- Special Note: There are only 2 ways to the island – by guided tour boat or canoe or kayak. Visit the Trail Contacts below for more information.
- Trail Contact: Mound Island / Bartram Canoe Trail Info: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Ste 468, Montgomery, AL 36130; (334) 242-3484; [lands.dcnr.alabama.gov/Bartram](http://lands.dcnr.alabama.gov/Bartram); Canoe / Tour Guide Info: Delta Safaris, 4891 Battleship Pwky, Spanish Fort, AL 36527; (251) 259-8531; [www.5rds.com](http://www.5rds.com)
- Trailhead GPS: N31 00.534' / W-87 56.039'



## 9. Historic Blakeley State Park (Spanish Fort)

- Length: Variable, up to 15-miles
- Difficulty: Moderate
- Highlights: Historic Blakeley 15-miles of trails that interconnect to take you to the banks of the second largest river delta in the country, the Mobile-Tensaw, and the site of the last major battle of the Civil War. The Confederate Breastworks Trail follows some of the best preserved Civil War breastworks in the south and takes you to the site of the “Battle of Blakeley”. The trail winds its way to the battlefield where you will see gunner positions, the “Zig-Zag” that union troops used to sneak up on the Confederate side, and two well preserved redoubts.
- Best Seasons / Fees: September – early May; Day use park fee
- Trail Contact: Blakeley Historic State Park, 34745 State Hwy. 225, Spanish Fort, AL 36577; (251) 626-0798; [www.blakeleypark.com](http://www.blakeleypark.com)
- Trailhead GPS: N30 44.498', W87 54.986'



## 10. Fort Morgan Loop (Fort Morgan)

- Length: 2.4-mile loop
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: From the ramparts of Fort Morgan that overlook the symbolic divide between the Gulf of Mexico and Mobile Bay you can almost hear the canons roar, smell the sulfur of gun powder, and feel the desperation of the Confederate soldiers as they clung to one of the last coastal fortresses in their possession during the Civil War. This is the site of the famous "Battle of Mobile Bay" where Admiral David Farragut, after watching the sinking of the ironclad Tecumseh, uttered those immortal words, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" over 150 years ago. But that battle is only a part of this massive stone fort's history as you will discover on this coastal loop hike.
- Best Seasons / Fees: Year round; Park admission required
- Trail Contact: Fort Morgan State Historic Park, 110 State Highway 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542; (251) 540-7127; [www.fort-morgan.org](http://www.fort-morgan.org)
- Trailhead GPS: N30 13.776' / W88 01.321'

