

THE RIVER REGION MAGAZINE

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Hike Alabama

The mercury's dropping; the leaves are trading their verdant green hues for warm tones of gold, bronze and scarlet. Now's the time to take in the wonders of nature across our great state, and there is no better way to experience them than by a walk along one of Alabama's many hiking trails. Don't know where to go? Joe Cuhaj with The Alabama Hiking Trail Society has kindly provided us with a list outlining his suggestions for fulfilling fall hikes. Read on to discover a trek that has your name on it.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ALABAMA BUREAU OF TOURISM & TRAVEL

MOUNTAIN REGION:

Cane Creek Preserve (Tuscumbia)

This private preserve was purchased by Jim and Faye Lacefield in the 1970s with the sole purpose of inviting the public to take in the beauty of the land. And there is some spectacular land to take in! Cane Creek Canyon Preserve combines some of the most remarkable canyon scenery you'll find anywhere with spectacular wildflowers, crystal clear streams and waterfalls. As with all canyon hikes, it's easy in, but somewhat strenuous to get out if you're not in the best shape. Contact Dr. Jim Lacefield before heading out at (256) 381-6301.

Walls of Jericho

The "Walls" have been described as one of Alabama's most beautiful destinations. This 6.4-mile out-and-back hike takes you deeper and deeper in the canyon until the walls jut up around you. The swift, clear waters of Hurricane and Turkey Creek fill the canyon with sound and lead you to the Walls themselves—a spectacular high-walled limestone canyon with breathtaking multi-tiered falls. The upper falls actually flows into a hole in the wall then reappears, shooting out of the bottom of the canyon into a deep pool.

DeSoto State Park (Fort Payne)

There are just too many great trails to visit while at DeSoto, but the most popular is the Lost Falls Trail. This easy 3.2-mile loop trail features three wonderful waterfalls and two interesting geologic formations including Needle Eye Rock (so named because massive boulders form a small "eye" between the rocks) and CR Caves, a series of formations cut away thousands of years ago by the Laurel Creek making small cave-like overhangs around which the trail travels.

METRO REGION:

Nubbin Creek Trail (Talladega National Forest)

This is a 4-mile out-and-back hike that's moderate in difficulty, but oh so worth it! Nubbin is one of the "hidden" secrets in the forest. The trail travels through a mix of oaks and pines over generally dirt footpaths. It meanders gradually up the side of Talladega Mountain where it comes to a breathtaking view of a gorge, the waters of Mill Shoals Creek cascading over the rocks far below. From there the route passes two beautiful waterfalls before coming to a clearing with panoramic views of the Talladega Forest. The trail actually continues on another mile to the top of the moun

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THE LONG WALK

The Great Eastern Trail travels over 2,000 miles from the Alabama-Florida state line near Pensacola, through the mountains of Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and finally into New York.

The trail, also known as the GET, is a series of existing trails that are being interconnected to form the long path. But over 230 miles of it in Alabama run along roads. The Alabama Hiking Trail Society (AHTS) has been tapped by the American Hiking Society to take the trail in Alabama off the road and into woods as much as possible.

Currently AHTS is working with organizations such as Forever Wild and the South Eastern Foot Trail Coalition to make this dream a reality. AHTS is Alabama's only statewide hiking organization whose mission is to promote, protect, maintain and develop safe and scenic hiking trails.

VISIT THESE SITES FOR MORE INFORMATION.

www.hikealabama.org

www.greateastertrail.org

tain (making it a 6-mile total trip), but the first two miles up are definitely the best.

Ruffner Mountain

A secret hideaway nestled in the suburbs of Birmingham, Ruffner Mountain Nature Center is a treasure trove of hiking adventure with over 11-miles of beautifully maintained hiking trails. Whether it's views from atop Hawk's View, a fossil hunt in the quarry, or taking in one of the center's MANY educational programs, Ruffner Mountain is a not-to-miss destination.

RIVER REGION:

Flagg Mountain

Flagg Mountain is one of the state's best-kept secrets. On this, the last mountain over 1,000-feet in the Appalachian Mountain chain, we find the remnants of what was to have been a state park back in the 1930s. Here on top of the mountain stands only the second of two stone fire towers hand built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Beyond the history, the views are panoramic. On a clear autumn evening, you can see the lights of Birmingham and Montgomery on the horizon. A new loop trail is being completed around the top of the mountain by the Alabama Hiking Trail Society that will take you there. One day soon, this trail will connect directly with the Appalachian Trail. **ML**

Joe Cuhaj with the Alabama Hiking Trail Society contributed to this article, which features excerpts from his book "Hiking Alabama," published by Falcon Books.