

A family of six is hiking in a rocky, wooded area. In the foreground, a man in a blue hoodie and cap, a woman with a green backpack, and two children are looking towards a cave entrance. A boy in a grey t-shirt is standing on a rock ledge near the cave. The background shows a large rock formation with a dark opening. The ground is covered with fallen leaves.

**A Holiday 2019 Gift  
My 10 Favorite Family Friendly  
Alabama Hikes**

**by Joe Cuhaj**

Copyright © 2019 Hawham Publications

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America

[www.joecuhaj.com](http://www.joecuhaj.com)

The following material originally appeared in Joe Cuhaj's Falcon Guides "Hiking Alabama", "Hiking Through History Alabama", "Hiking the Gulf Coast", and "Best Dog Hikes Alabama" and have been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

All titles are available at your local bookstore or online at Amazon.Com and Barnes and Noble (BN.COM)

The author and Globe Pequot Press assume no liability for accidents happening to, or injuries sustained by, readers who engage in the activities described in this book.

## Introduction

It's really hard to believe that next year, October 1, 2020, marks 20 years since my first book was published – *Hike America Alabama*. To this day, it still amazes me how it came about.

It all started as I was hawking short stories to various magazines throughout the 1990s. I had moderate success but wanted something more. So after I left my career in radio broadcasting and moved into software programming (I know, big change, don't ask), I decided to put my two loves together – hiking and writing – and created a CD ROM (remember those?) about section hiking the Appalachian Trail. It had tons of text, photos, videos, even audio.

Well, as the story goes, I submitted the CD to 20 publishers. Immediately, my rejection slip collection grew by 19, but the 20<sup>th</sup>, a small company called Beachway Press in Virginia, told me that there was too much information on the market about the A.T., but would I consider writing a book on hiking in Alabama. The rest is history.

So, here we are, twenty years later. *Hike America Alabama* was rebranded as *Hike Alabama* when Beachway was purchased by Falcon Books, then again as *Hiking Alabama*. The book is now in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition, all thanks to YOU, and I cannot thank you enough for making it a success.

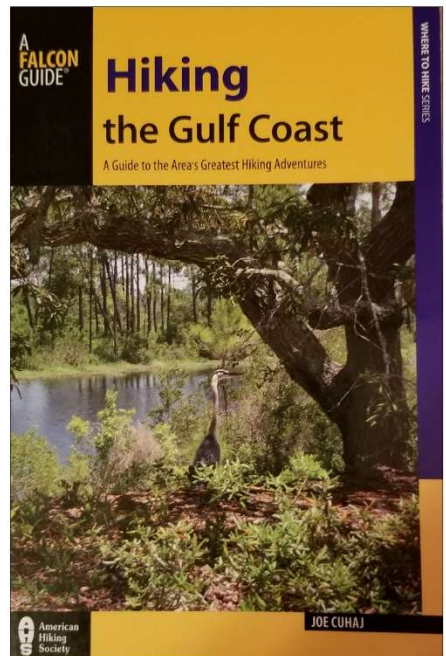
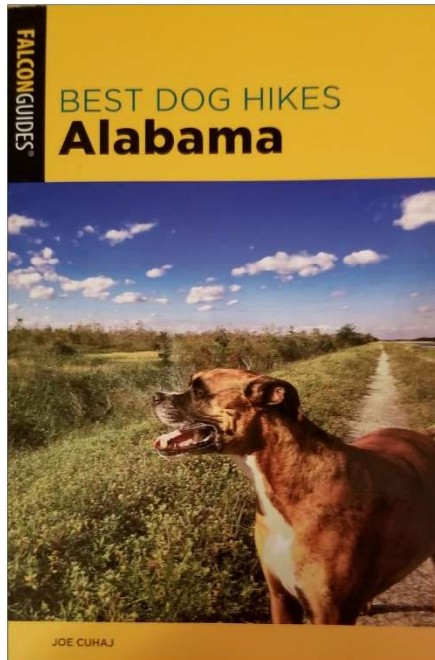
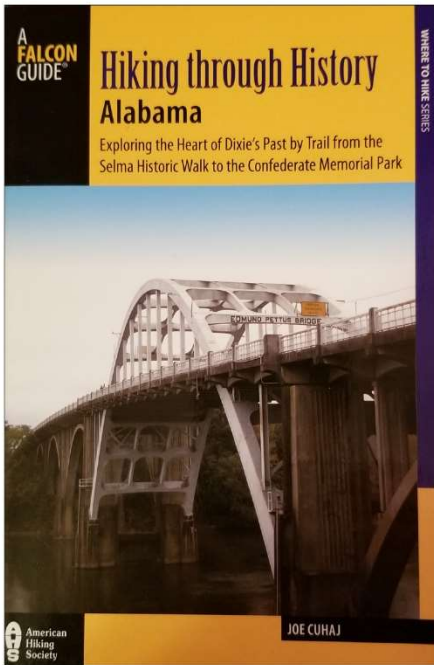
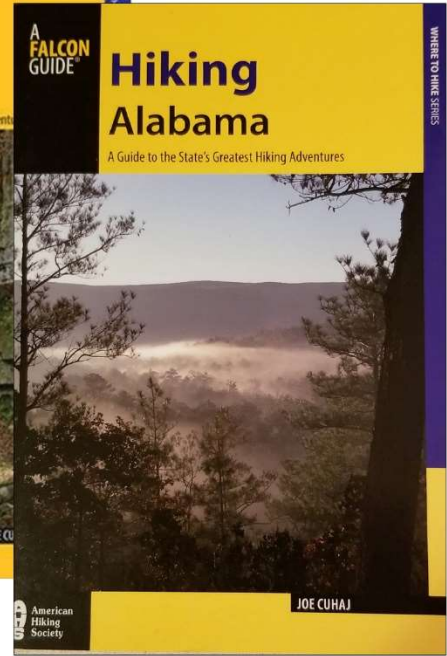
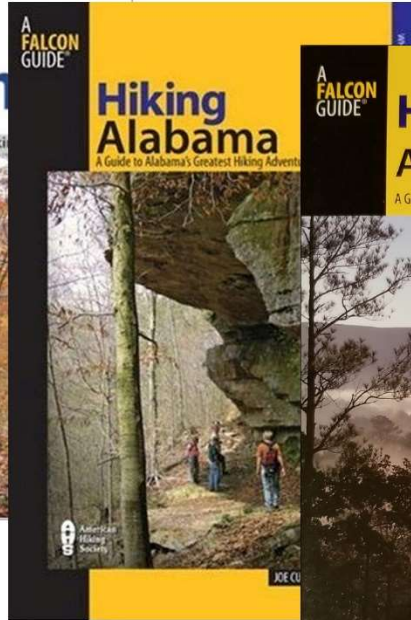
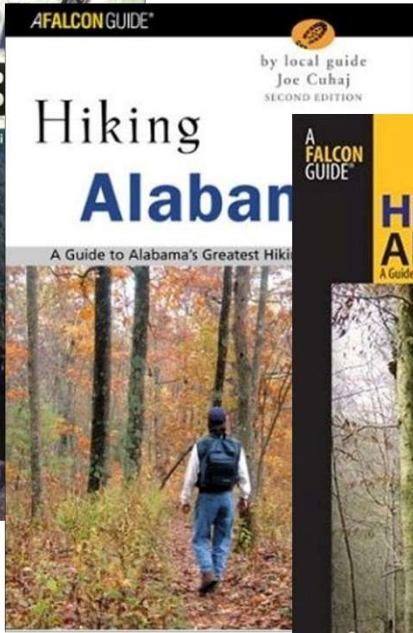
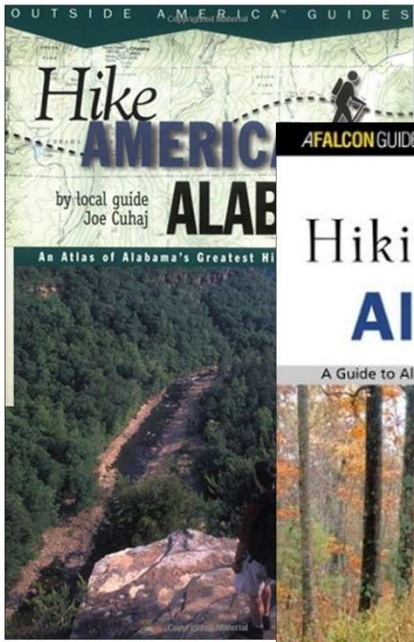
Since that time, three more hiking guides have been released with two more on the way, a tent camping guide, paddling guide, and two history books, not to mention my short stories that have found homes, both in magazines and in my podcasts.

Each Christmas since this all began, I have put together a little something to say thank you for your support and this year is no exception. Many people have asked me over the years what my favorite family friendly trails are in Alabama. So this year, I've put together 10 of my favorites. The trouble is – there are MANY more! It's really hard to decide. Each trail, no matter where you roam, is special in its own right. But I hope this booklet gives you an idea of some of the great family friendly trails there are in the state and gives you inspiration to go out and explore.

## BONUS!!!

As a bonus this year, I'm giving you the GPX files of each of these hikes so you can load them into your own GPS unit! Here's how to get yours:

Simply drop me a line either by **Facebook Messenger**, my contact form on my website <http://www.joe-cuhaj.com/contact.html>, or email me at [jocuhajauthor@gmail.com](mailto:jocuhajauthor@gmail.com) and let me know that you'd like the Holiday 2019 GPX Set and I'll send them to you in a zip file. It's that simple!



## Gulf Coast Region: Pine Beach Trail – Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

Trailhead GPS: N30° 14.819' / W87° 49.734'  
Distance: 3.4-mile out-and-back  
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (extended beach sand walking)  
Nearest Town: Gulf Shores  
Canine Compatibility: No pets  
Fees: None  
Trail Contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Highway 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542  
(251) 540-7720  
[www.fws.gov/bonsecour](http://www.fws.gov/bonsecour)

Just down the road from Gulf Shores on the Alabama Gulf Coast you'll find an amazing hiking destination - the 7,000-acre Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge was established by Congress on June 9, 1980, and is one of the last undisturbed areas of coastal barrier remaining in the state.

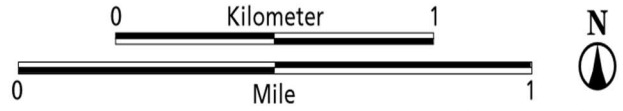
The refuge is aptly named. Bon Secour is a French word that means "safe harbor" and that's exactly what it is - a safe harbor for a wide range of wildlife and plants. Within the confines of the refuge you will see hundreds of species of water fowl and migratory birds like osprey, great blue heron and brown pelicans, cattle egrets, and peregrines. Wildlife includes your everyday variety like squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons, but you'll also find armadillos, American alligators, and bobcat.

Bon Secour also plays host to a few endangered species of wildlife including the Alabama beach mouse which lives in the dunes, piping plover (a shorebird that nests on beaches), and the loggerhead sea turtle.

The *Pine Beach Trail* will lead you to all that makes the refuge spectacular. Along the trail you will experience beautiful ancient oak trees draped in Spanish moss, maritime wetlands and forests, many species of birds and wildlife, and the pristine - and secluded - white beaches of the Gulf of Mexico, a prime habitat for nesting loggerhead sea turtles. Halfway to the beach, you will come to a tall wildlife viewing platform overlooking Little Lagoon and Gator Lake, the perfect place for lunch and quiet contemplation.



# Pine Beach Trail



## Gulf Coast Region: Jeff Friend / Centennial Trails – Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

Trailhead GPS: Jeff Friend - N30° 14.668' / W87° 47.235'  
Centennial - Accessed either from the Jeff Friend or Pine Beach Trailheads

Distance: Jeff Friend Trail – 1-mile loop  
Centennial Trail – Either 5-mileS or 6-miles depending on where you start (see text)

Difficulty: Easy

Nearest Town: Gulf Shores

Canine Compatibility: No pets

Fees: None

Trail Contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Highway 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542  
(251) 540-7720  
[www.fws.gov/bonsecour](http://www.fws.gov/bonsecour)

### ***Jeff Friend Trail: 1.0-mile loop***

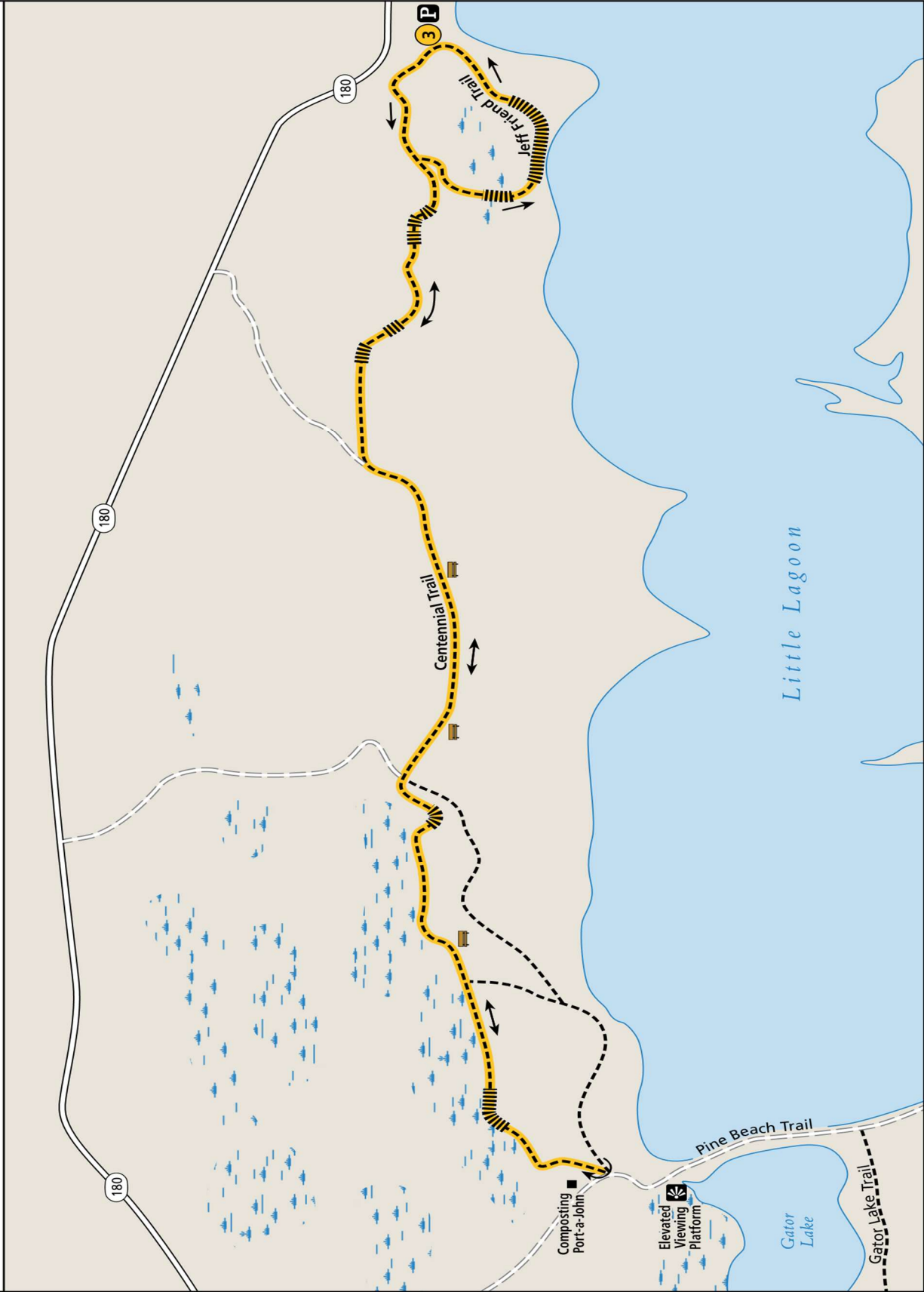
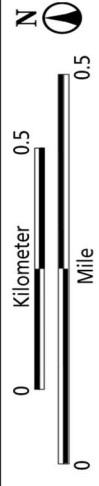
The Jeff Friend Trail is a great little hike if you have younger children. This easy walking loop is loaded with wildflowers and a boardwalk along the banks of Little Lagoon. The trail is also ADA accessible.

### ***Centennial Trail: Either 5.0 or 6.0***

A beautiful hike of exploration through the transitional maritime forests and wetlands of Alabama's Gulf Coast, the Centennial Trail gives you a chance to visit beautiful wetlands with wildflowers and waterfowl. The actual trail is a 4-mile out-and-back BUT to get there you either have to walk 0.5-miles along the Jeff Friend Trail making it a 5-mile out-and-back or hike 1-mile down the Pine Beach Trail making it a 6-mile out-and-back.



# Jeff Friend/Centennial Trail





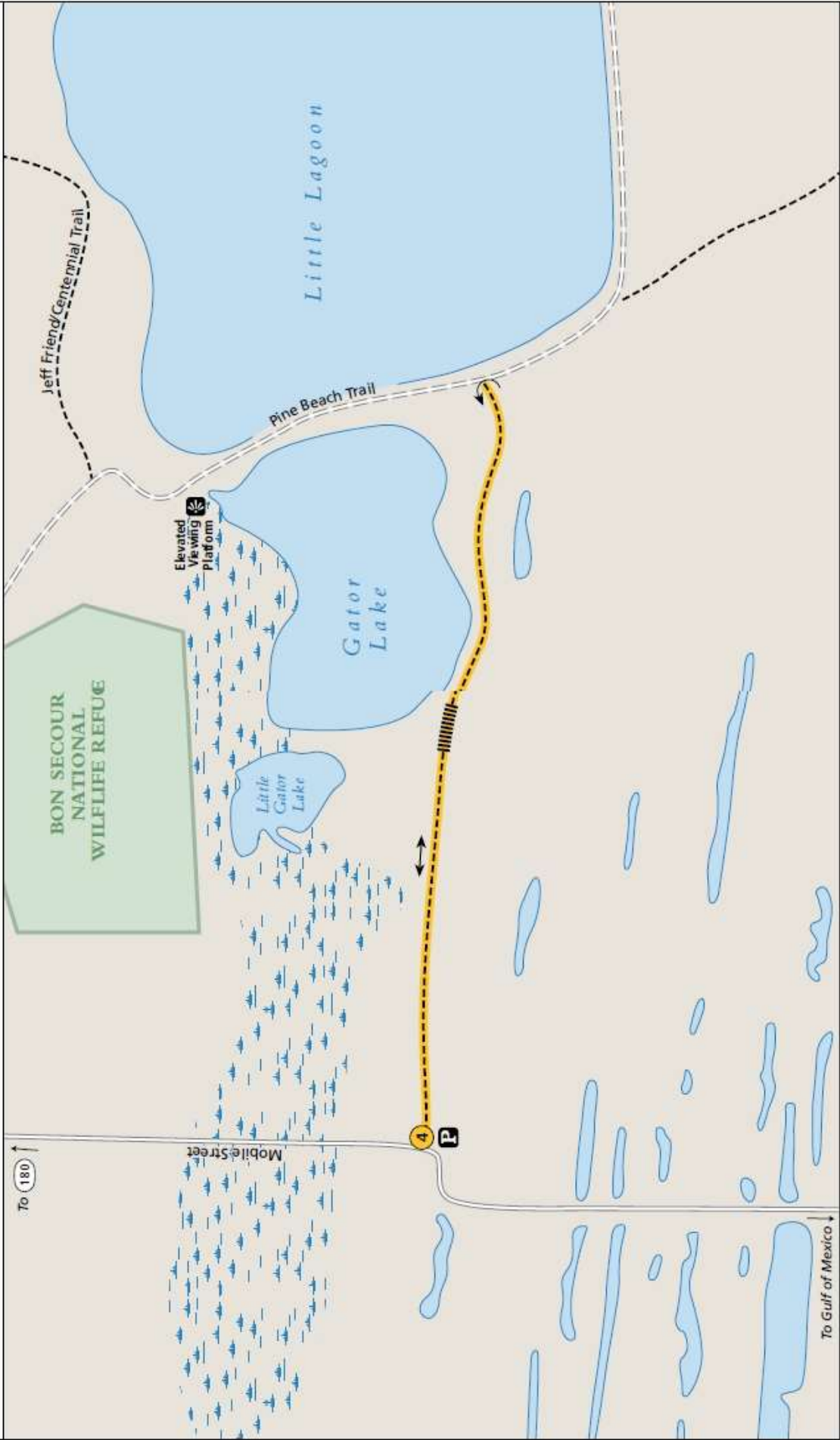
## Gulf Coast Region: Gator Lake Trail – Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

Trailhead GPS: N30° 14.187' / W87° 49.816'  
Distance: 1.5-mile out-and-back  
Difficulty: Easy  
Nearest Town: Gulf Shores  
Canine Compatibility: No pets  
Fees: None  
Trail Contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Highway 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542  
(251) 540-7720  
[www.fws.gov/bonsecour](http://www.fws.gov/bonsecour)

A beautiful, and easy, out-and-back hike that allows hikers of all ages to experience some of the wonders of the refuge. This path will take you past the fresh water Gator Lake over rolling sand dunes dotted with beautiful black eye Susan's, wild rosemary, blazing star, and of course wildlife including dozens of species of migratory birds, monarch butterflies, and maybe an alligator or two.



# Gator Lake Trail



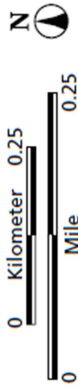
## Gulf Coast Region: Fort Gaines / Audubon Bird Sanctuary

Trailhead GPS: N30° 15.028' / W88° 05.238'  
Distance: 3.4-mile Scorpion Loop  
Difficulty: Easy  
Nearest Town: Dauphin Island  
Canine Compatibility: Pets allowed on leash. There are alligators in the lake and swamp.  
Fees: None to hike, admission fee at the fort  
Trail Contact: Fort Gaines Historic Site, 51 Bienville Blvd., Dauphin Island, AL 36528;  
(251) 861-6992; [www.dauphinisland.org/fort-gaines](http://www.dauphinisland.org/fort-gaines)

You could drive to historic Fort Gaines on Alabama's barrier island, Dauphin Island, but why do that when you can hike to it via this gem of a trail that's located on the eastern tip of the island? This hike will not only take you through some magnificent wetlands and forest to do a little bird watching or maybe spot dolphins frolicking in the surf of the Gulf of Mexico, but also a wonderful beach walk along the shoreline of the Gulf that culminates in a visit to Fort Gaines, a massive stone fortress that is the twin of Fort Morgan and that also, like it's twin, played an important role in the Civil War's "Battle of Mobile Bay".



# Fort Gaines Loop



## South Region: Five Runs Loop (Conecuh National Forest)

Trailhead GPS: N31° 05.411' / W86° 32.695'  
Distance: 5.1-mile loop, 5.8 if you include a loop around Open Pond  
Difficulty: Moderate  
Nearest Town: Andalusia  
Canine Compatibility: Pets Allowed, recommend on leash near the water features – there are alligators  
Fees: Day Use Fee  
Trail Contact: Conecuh National Forest, 24481 Alabama Highway 55, Andalusia, AL 36420  
(334) 222-2555  
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/alabama/recreation/picnickinginfo/recarea/?recid=30107&actid=71>

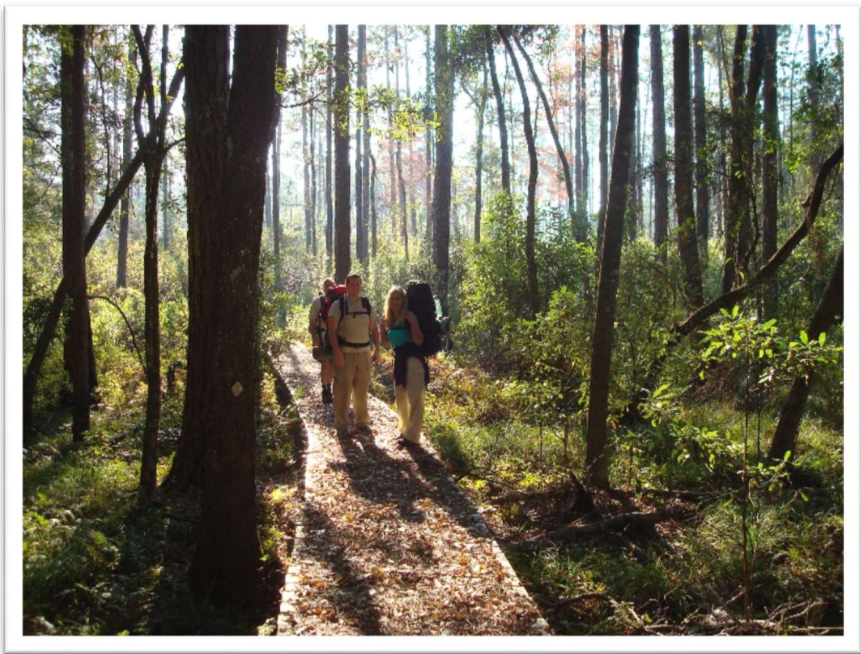
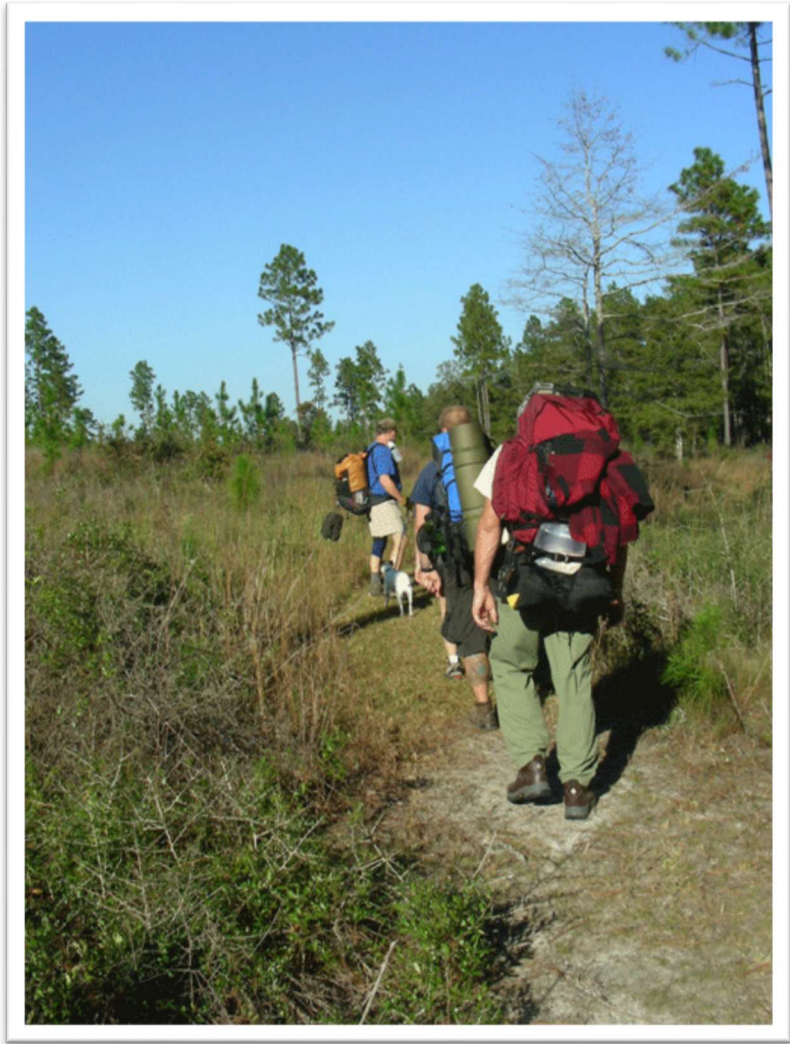
*Five Runs Loop* is a beautiful, serene walk through a long leaf pine forest. What's special about this 5.8-mile loop in the Conecuh National Forest are the water features that you will visit and the wildlife you may encounter.

The trek takes you away from the crowds at the Open Pond Recreation Area so you'll have a better chance of seeing some of that wildlife that calls the forest home. Among the endangered species of wildlife you may see on your journey includes the flattened musk turtle, gopher tortoise, and red-cockaded woodpecker. And there's a good possibility you'll encounter white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, and wild turkeys.

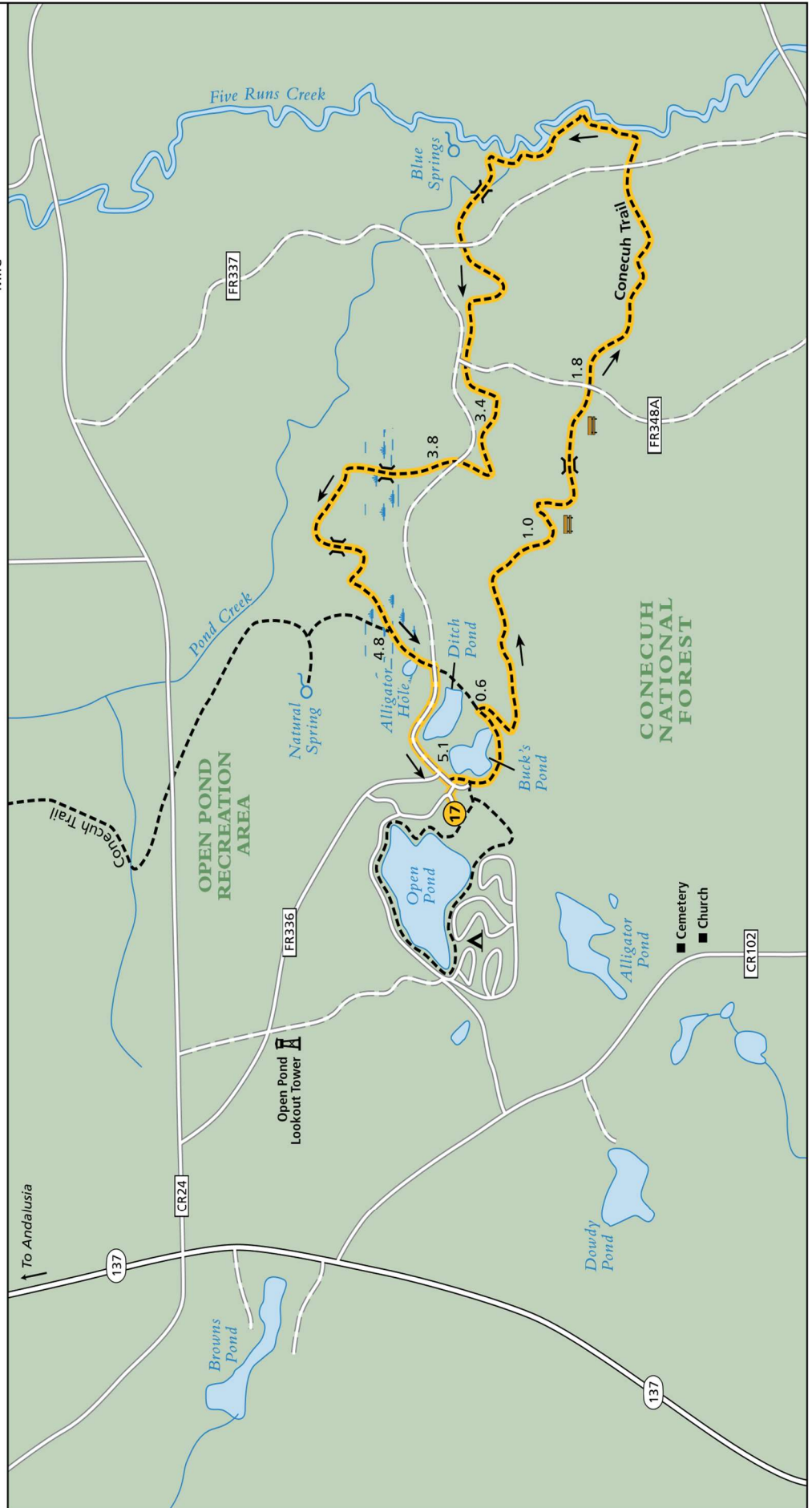
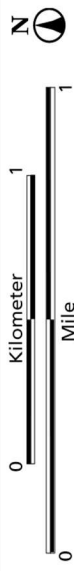
You will pass both Buck and Ditch Ponds where a variety of waterfowl including wood duck, pied-billed grebes, and belted kingfishers may be seen. Then you will arrive at the trail's namesake, Five Runs Creek. This is a wide and fast flowing black water river with a few shoals that feeds the Blackwater River and eventually flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

At the far end of the loop you will come to Blue Spring, a beautiful crystal clear icy blue natural spring. It is so clear you can see the rock formations below the surface. The spring is plenty deep and makes a great place to swim in the hot summer months but with no lifeguards, **swim at your own risk**.

The final pond you'll come to is Alligator Hole. Heed the posted warnings. It is a federal crime punishable by jail time and \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for a group, to injure or molest an alligator. I'm sure you're thinking the same thing—who in their right mind would molest an alligator. Just don't tangle with them!



# Five Runs Loop



## Central Region: John B. Scott Forever Wild Trail

Trailhead GPS: N32° 40.375' / W85° 54.516'  
Distance: 4.1-mile loop  
Difficulty: Moderate with a rather steep climb up Saddle Rock Mountain  
Nearest Town: Tallassee  
Canine Compatibility: Pets allowed  
Fees: None  
Trail Contact: Alabama Forever Wild, State Lands Division, 64 North Division St., Montgomery; (334) 242-3484; [www.alabamaforeverwild.com](http://www.alabamaforeverwild.com)  
Cherokee Ridge Alpine Trail Association; [www.crata.org](http://www.crata.org)

A beautiful hike awaits you on the newest hiking trail built by the Cherokee Ridge Alpine Trail Association along the banks of the Tallapoosa River at Lake Martin Dam – the *John B. Scott Forever Wild Trail*.

This hike weaves its way back and forth across a sparkling creek that has several small cascades and feeder springs. If you hike with your dog, they will love these features. The highlight of the trek is a spectacular view of the surrounding tree covered hills and valleys from the boulder strewn summit of Saddle Rock Mountain.

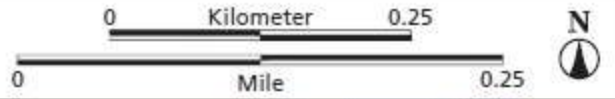
This 4.1-mile loop is white paint blazed and leads you through a couple of transitioning environments. It begins on an old, wide dirt and gravel road, Goldmine Road, along the banks of the Tallapoosa River. The river is wide and peaceful with only an occasional motorboat cruising by. The trail then moves away from the river and turns into a narrow 2 to 3-foot dirt, rock, and root studded path that zig-zags its way back and forth across that clear, sparkling creek, its waters tumbling down a rocky bed creating several small cascades. You'll follow the creek for almost 1.1-miles, crossing over it several times as you make your way along the relatively flat trail. The path is lined with blooming and fragrant mountain laurel, dogwoods, and big leaf magnolia.

Soon you will notice that the rocks are turning into boulders. You are now beginning the climb up the ridge. You will start seeing some nice views until before long, you find yourself on top of Saddle Rock Mountain. The mountain is strewn with boulders and a great rock outcropping that gives you a panoramic view of the surrounding hills and valleys. It's a great place to sit back, relax, take in the view, and catch a little sun, but of course, it goes without saying but I will - be safe on the bluffs.





# John B. Scott Forever Wild Trail



## Central Region: Red Mountain Park

Trailhead GPS: N33° 26.712' / W86° 51.749'  
Distance: 5.4-mile loop  
Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult (difficult on the Smythe and Ike Maston Trails which are labeled “most difficult” by the park)  
Nearest Town: Hoover  
Canine Compatibility: Pets allowed  
Fees: None  
Trail Contact: Red Mountain Park, 277 Lyon Ln., Birmingham, AL 35211; (205) 202-6043;  
www.redmountainpark.org

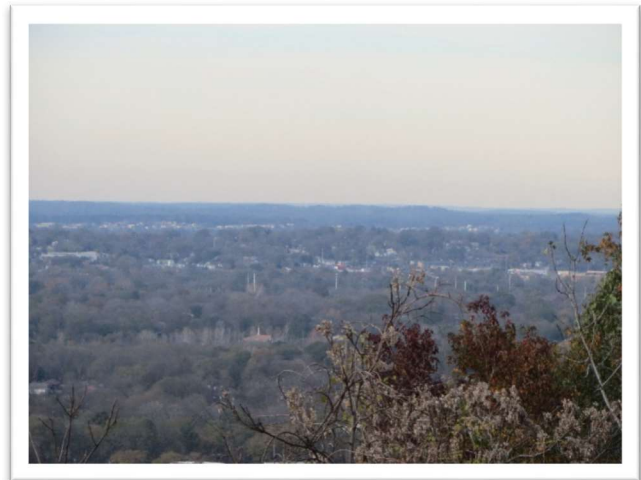
The first thing you’ll notice when you hit the trails at Red Mountain Park is that they all have a red hue to them. That color harkens back to the 1800s when the city of Birmingham appeared almost overnight as entrepreneurs realized the region sat on a goldmine. Not literally on gold but something that would create Alabama’s largest city.

It turns out that the area is one of the few places in the world where all three ingredients for making iron and steel – hematite (iron ore), limestone, and coke (coal) – can be found all in one location. With that discovery, the “Magic City” was born, quickly making it a rival to the giant steel city, Pittsburgh.

Red Mountain Park provides a glimpse back in time to the mining hey-day of the city over its 14-miles of trail that wind their way up and down slopes visiting long since abandoned iron mines and hoist houses that once drove the monetary juggernaut.

Today, Red Mountain is much more than an historical preserve. It is a beautiful nature preserve as well with wildflowers, frog pond, and wildlife like white tailed deer and fox roaming about the paths. The park’s trails weave their way around the mountain side, interconnecting with each other to form an intricate set of possible loop hikes that take you more than one day to hike them all.

When you’re done hiking, check out the zip line canopy and Segway tours of the park.



# Red Mountain



## North Region: Fall Creek Falls

Trailhead GPS: N34° 18.567' W87° 23.658' (Borden Creek Trailhead)  
N34° 17.133' W87° 23.919' (Sipsey Wilderness Recreation Area)

Distance: 5.6-mile out-and-back (via Borden Creek Trail) or a 2.2-mile out-and-back from the Sipsey Wilderness Recreation Area

Difficulty: Moderate

Nearest Town: Moulton

Canine Compatibility: Pets allowed

Fees: None if hiking from Borden Creek, day use fee if starting at the Sipsey Wilderness Recreation Area

Trail Contact: Bankhead National Forest, Bankhead Ranger District, 1070 Hwy 33, Double Springs; (205) 489-5111; [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/alabama/about-forest/districts/?cid=fsbdev3\\_002553](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/alabama/about-forest/districts/?cid=fsbdev3_002553)

I don't know of any time when I have visited the Sipsey Wilderness that I left feeling disappointed. The geology, wildflowers, and water features are unbelievable.

The wilderness and surrounding Bankhead National Forest is known as the "Land of a Thousand Waterfalls" and for good reason. It seems that around every bend there is a cascade flowing down the sandstone canyon walls. Now keep in mind that most of these waterfalls, like many throughout the state, are seasonal and depending on the weather may or may not be there, but after some rain, they are magnificent.

One of the more famous waterfalls in the Sipsey is *Fall Creek Falls*, our destination for this hike. There are two ways to get to the falls. The first is via the Sipsey's *Trail 200* (Borden Creek Trail) and *Trail 209* (the Sipsey Trail). This is a 5.6 mile out-and-back that starts at the Borden Creek Trailhead.

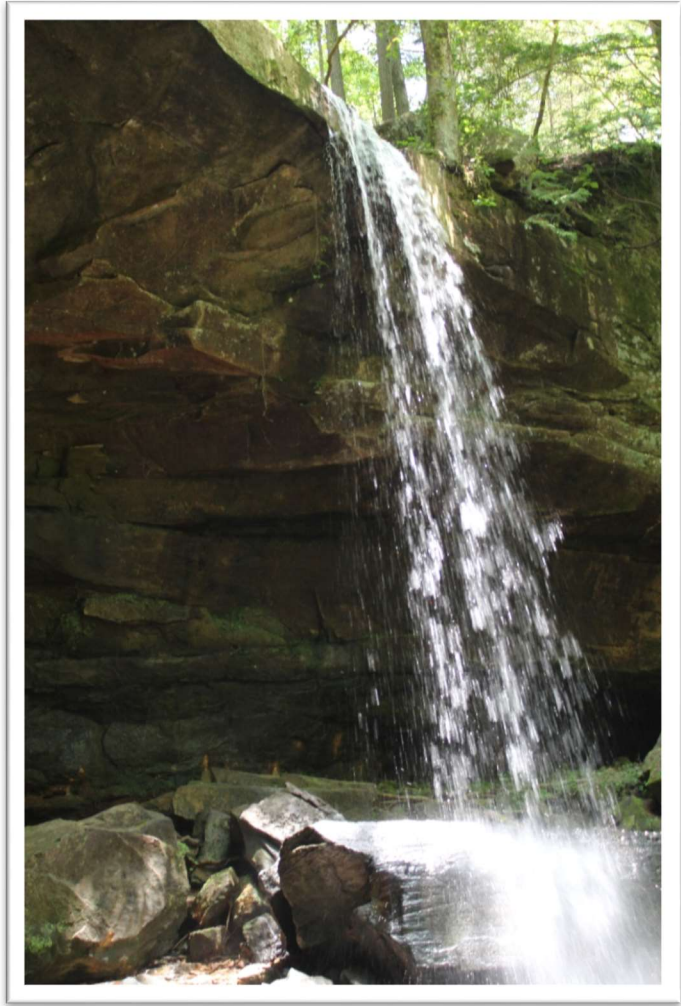
Trail 200 is just a plain and simple fun trail. The rock outcroppings, towering bluffs, and deep shelters are spectacular and invite exploring. A half mile into the hike comes a little surprise - a short walk through a cave called *Fat Man's Squeeze*. It's an L-shaped walk through a tunnel, nothing too difficult or long but can be a bit slippery when the small ribbon falls at one end of the cave is flowing. The squeeze adds a little excitement to the hike. If you have kids, they'll love it.

In 1.7-miles, Trail 200 intersects with Trail 209. Here you'll have to get your feet wet and ford Borden Creek to pick up Trail 209 on the other side. Once across, turn left and in 0.6-miles, you'll reach the falls. When you're done viewing, turn around and retrace your steps back to the trailhead.

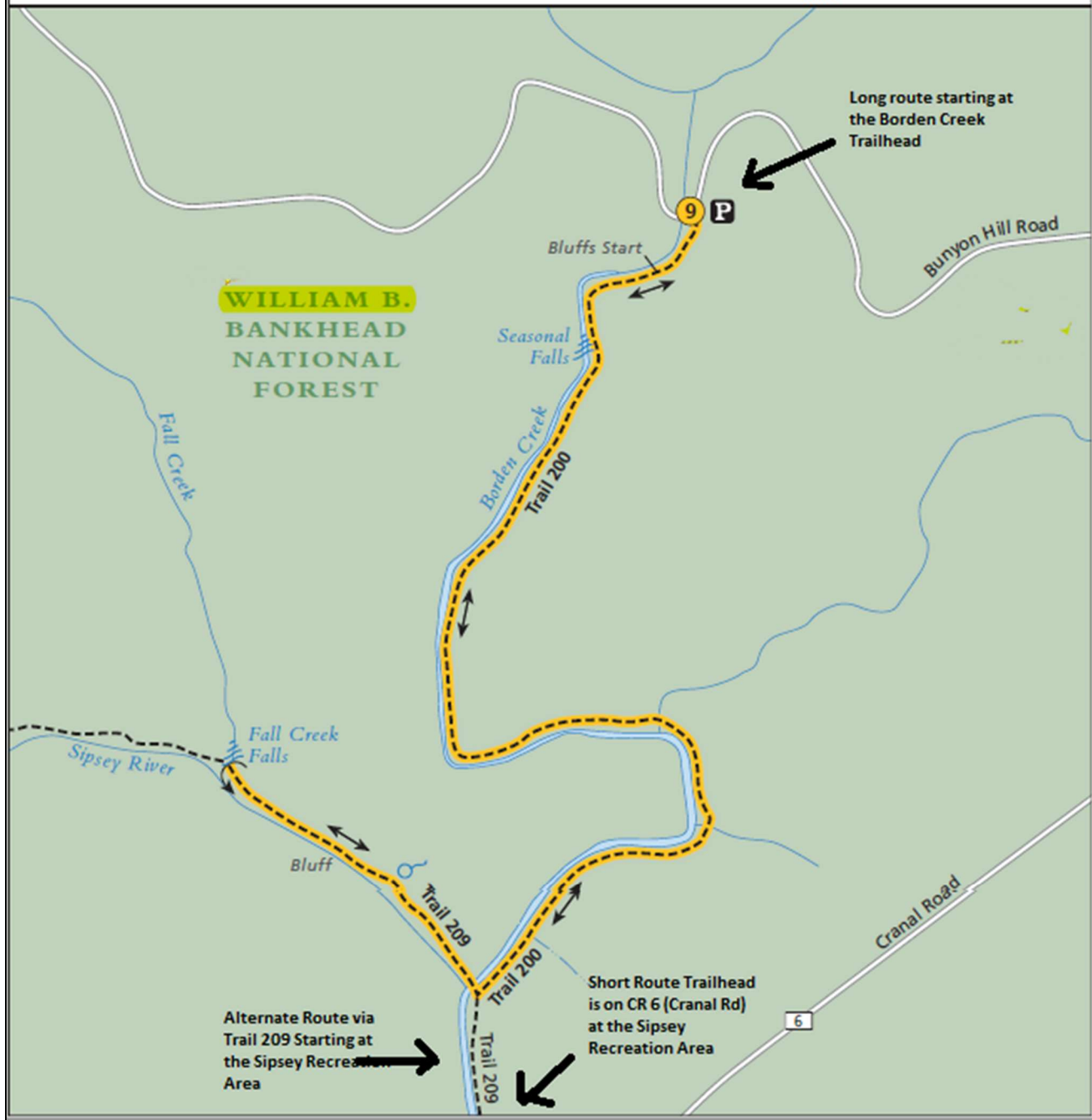
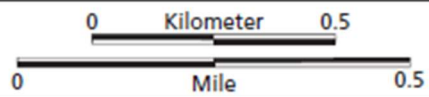
If you just want to see the falls and do a shorter hike avoiding Fat Man's Squeeze, then take the second route, the 2.2-mile out-and-back that begins at the Sipsey Wilderness Recreation Area on Cranal Road (remember, there is a \$3 fee to park here).

Pick up the trail on the north side of the parking lot as it crosses under a bridge. In 0.5-miles, you will come to the same intersection with the Borden Creek Trail (Trail 200) described earlier. Again, cross the creek and follow Trail 209 to the left on the other side to the falls which is 0.6-miles up the trail. When done viewing, retrace your steps back to the trailhead. Just remember, when using the shorter route from the recreation area, when you cross the creek on the return trip, turn right to head back to your car. If you're using the longer Borden Creek route, you would turn left here.

Remember, all trails in the wilderness are not blazed. There are only signs indicating where trails start and at intersections. When hiking the wilderness, you should always let someone know your plans. Let them know your route and what time you expect to return so that in the event of an emergency, they can find you.



# Fall Creek Falls



## North Region: Falls Loop

Trailhead GPS: N34° 30.072' / W85° 38.059'  
Distance: 3.1-mile loop  
Difficulty: Moderate over rocky terrain  
Nearest Town: Fort Payne  
Canine Compatibility: Pets allowed  
Trail Contact: DeSoto State Park, 7104 DeSoto Pkwy NE, Fort Payne; (256) 845-5380;  
[www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park](http://www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park)

Not one, not two, but three waterfalls will be found along what I call the *Falls Loop Trail* at DeSoto State Park. On this 3.1-mile long journey, you will visit the beautiful Lost Falls, Laurel Falls, and Azalea Cascade as they tumble down their rocky ledges.

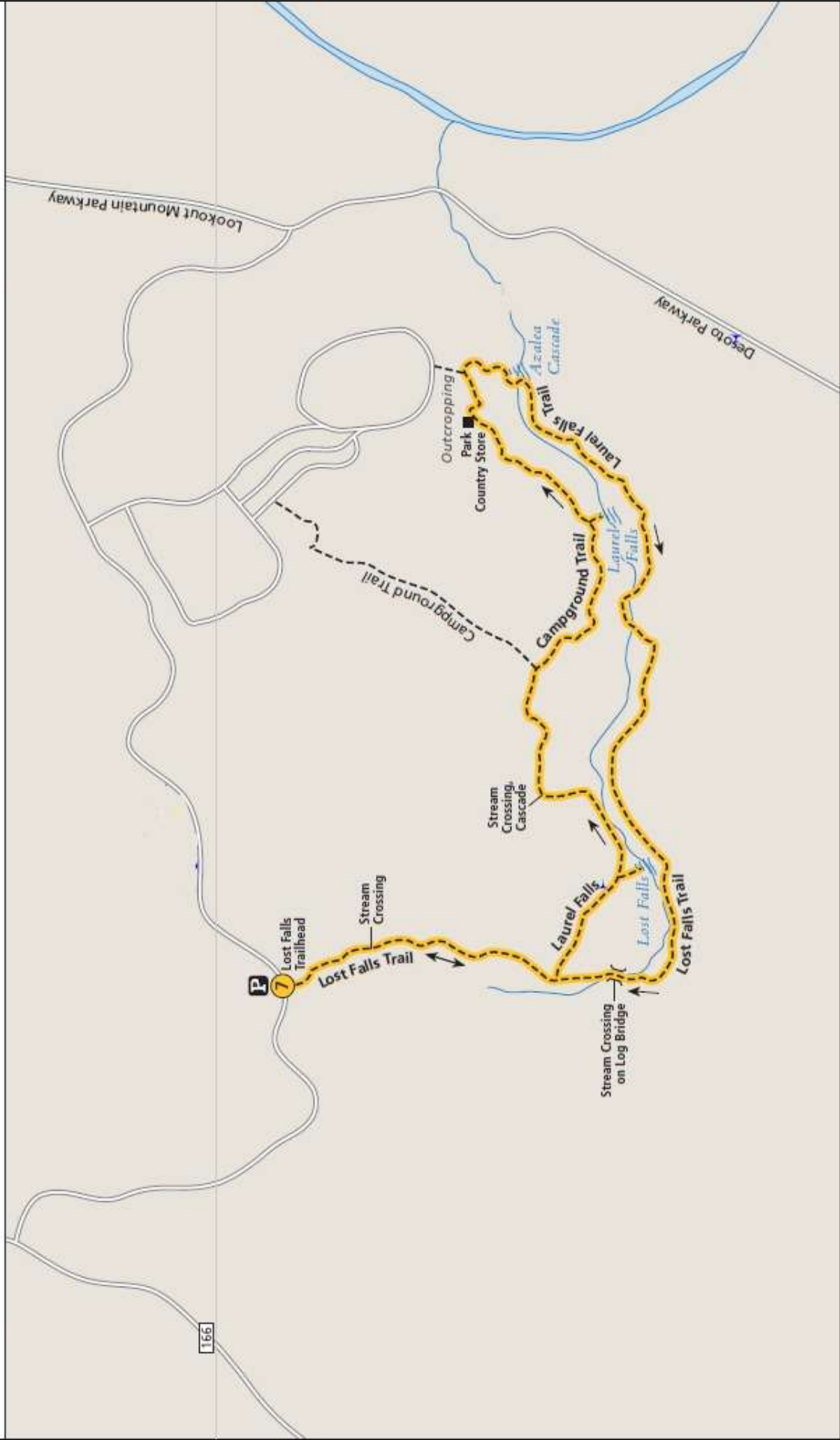
But it's not only the waterfalls that make this hike special. There are fascinating rock outcroppings, small rock shelters, and in the spring you will be rewarded with brilliant wildflowers lining the path. On the aptly named Azalea Cascade Trail, you will be walking through tunnels of fragrant blooming mountain laurel, azaleas and rhododendron in the spring.

Three separate trails interconnect to create the circuit – the orange blazed *Lost Falls Trail*, blue blazed *Laurel Falls Trail*, and the red *Azalea Cascade Trail*. The trails are well marked with the paint blazes easily found at just the right locations on trees and rocks so you will have a hard time getting lost. The loop is a moderate trek due to its rocky footing that does involve some climbing along the Azalea Cascade and Laurel Falls trails.

Side trails lead to better views of the falls, but be careful along the high rocky ledges.



# Falls Loop





## North Region: Shoal Creek Nature Preserve

Trailhead GPS: N34° 54.449' / W87° 37.240'  
Distance: Lawson Branch Trail – 2.4-mile lollipop loop  
Jones Branch Loop – 2.5-mile loop  
Together: 4.3-mile double loop  
Difficulty: Easy  
Nearest Town: Florence  
Canine Compatibility: Pets Allowed  
Trail Contact: Alabama State Lands ADCNR, 64 North Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130  
(334) 242-3484  
[www.alabamaforeverwild.com](http://www.alabamaforeverwild.com)

If you're looking for peace and tranquility on the trail, then head on up to Florence and hike the two loops of the *Shoal Creek Preserve*. This 298-acre tract is an excellent example of what the state's land conservation program, Forever Wild, is all about. The property was destined to be developed but with grants Forever Wild was able to acquire the land and open it to the public.

The stand out features at Shoal Creek are the water features that you'll visit on the preserve's two hiking trails, the 2.4-mile lollipop loop *Lawson Branch Trail* and the 2.5-mile *Jones Branch Loop*.

Both trails meander through several different habitats including mature upland hardwood stands, scenic creek bottoms, and fallow fields. The highlight of these hikes are the creeks and streams that course through the property. Along the Jones Branch Loop, you will experience some amazing cascades including a horseshoe shaped one along the branch with tumbling waters and a nice view from high atop a bluff of the wide Indian Camp Creek as it flows into Shoal Creek and eventually Wilson Lake.

To reach the Lawson Branch Loop you have to walk the left fork of the Jones Branch Loop so while you're here, why not hike both of the trails for a nice 4.3-mile double loop?



# Shoal Creek Preserve

