

Hikes of the Alabama Gulf Coast



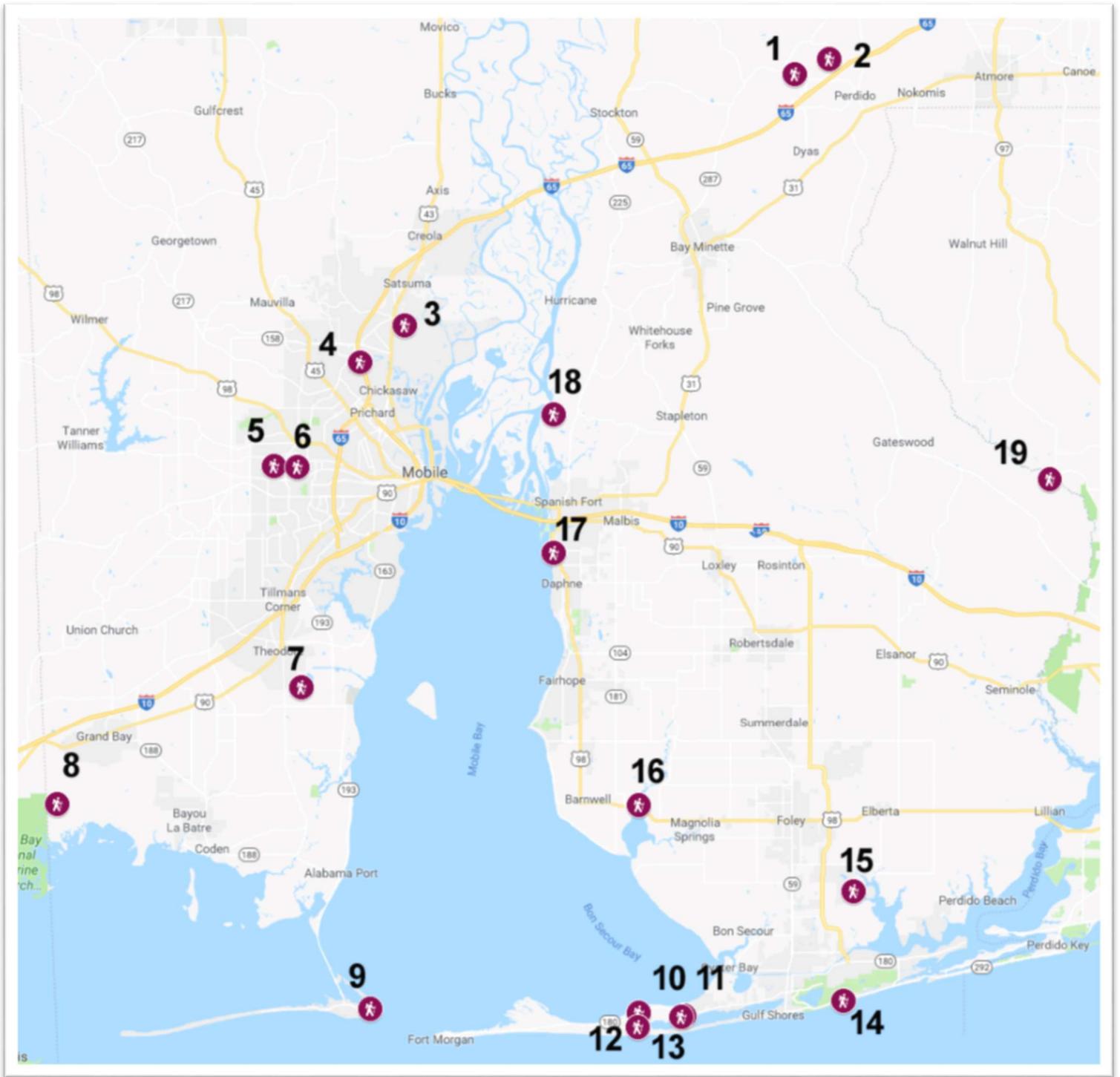
Joe Cuhaj

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www.joecuhaj.com



Introduction

Mobile and Baldwin County on Alabama's Gulf Coast is well-known around the country and the world for three things – the birthplace of Mardi Gras, our fantastic seafood, and our beaches. Oh, those beaches. Sugary white along the blue-green waters of the Gulf. It's no wonder that the region is one of the fastest growing in the South and the country. It's those beaches.

In the summer we have vacationers flocking in from across the globe; In the winter it's retired Northerners, who we affectionately call "Snow Birds", packing the hotels, B&B's, beach houses, and condos to avoid their brutal winters up north. It's one booming Gulf Coast tourist area.

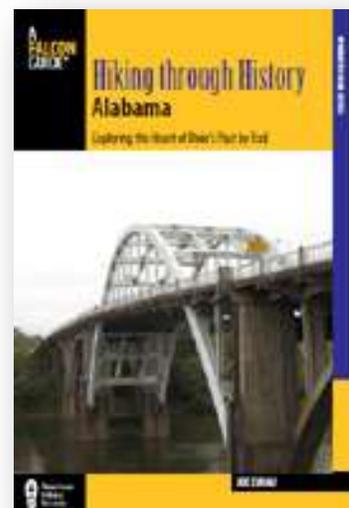
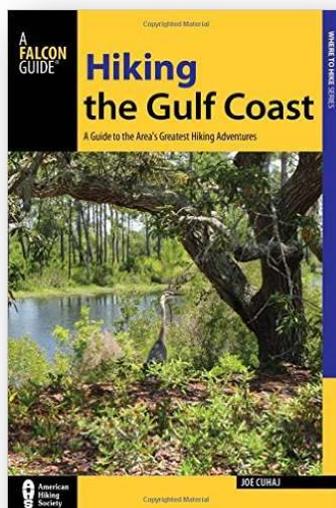
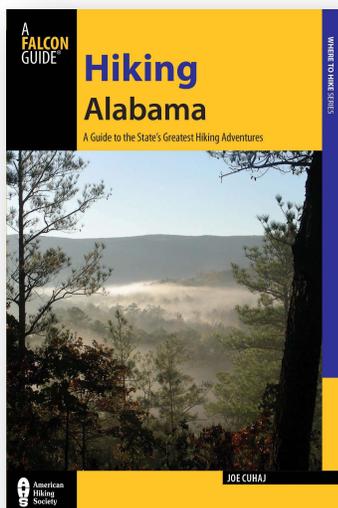
But there is more to the area than our beaches. I am often asked by our visitors what else is there to do here besides sunning and swimming. When I tell them there's hiking they look at me like I'm crazy. But yes, away from the condos and tourist trappings there are some spectacular hikes. No, it's not like climbing Mt. Cheaha (the state's highest mountain) or exploring the wild Walls of Jericho canyon in north Alabama. The trails are relatively flat, short, and great for all ages.

So with that in mind I was asked to do a presentation for a local outfitter, Red Bead's on Old Shell Road in Mobile, to do a presentation on hikes within an hour's drive of Mobile. I was VERY surprised to find that it wasn't only tourists and Snow Birds in the crowd that crammed into the store that night to hear what I had to say. There were MANY locals who had no idea that there were so many paths to hike in the area.

I gave the attendees a hand-out but wasn't satisfied with that. I thought everyone needed a little more information about these trails and that's why I created this booklet: to get you started on some of the amazing hikes found in Mobile and Baldwin Counties on the Alabama Gulf Coast.

You can find more detailed information on these hikes and others across the state and the Gulf Coast in any of my Falcon guidebooks which are available at your favorite bookstore or online. And if you have any questions I'd be more than happy to answer them. My contact information is at the end in the "IN ADDITION" section.

Happy Trails!! Cheers!! - - Joe Cuhaj



1. George W Folkert's Bog Trail (Nature Conservancy, Perdido)

- Length: 3.1-mile Out-and-Back
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Beautiful hike through a long leaf pine forest and bog with what has been described as the most “visually impressive pitcher plant bog in the world”, not to mention hundreds of wildflowers. The trail follows an old dirt logging road, with some travel off the main trail through a wide, and possibly deep in water, bog. Bring your insect repellent.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Best to visit March through May when the pitcher plants and wildflowers are blooming; Open dawn to dusk; No fees
- Trail Contact:
Nature Conservancy, 2100 1st Ave. N., Birmingham, AL 35203 -
www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/alabama/placesweprotect/splinter-hill-bog.xml



2. Splinter Hill Bog Complex (Forever Wild, Perdido)

- Length: 4-mile Loop
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Plenty of opportunities to view white top pitcher plants and a good chance of seeing deer, turkey, fox, and gopher tortoises. The tract was once owned by a timber company. Forever Wild is working to restore the long leaf pine forest. Check hunting seasons. The trail is basically an old logging road with one standard small dirt path from the southwest trailhead through a wetland. Bring your insect repellent.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Best to visit March through May when the flowers and pitcher plants are blooming; Open dawn to dusk; No fees; Hunting is allowed in the fall so check on seasons before heading out. (See “In Addition”)
- Trail Contact:
Alabama Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Montgomery, AL 36130 –
www.outdooralabama.org

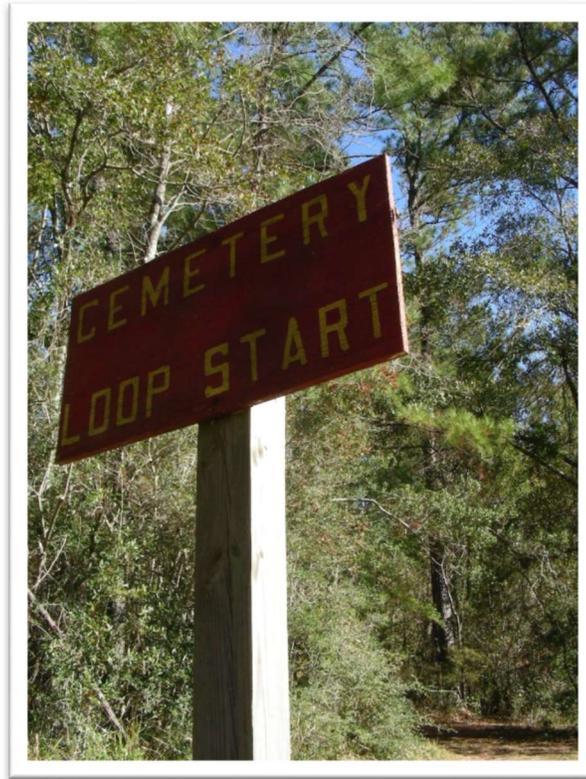


3. Jacinto Port (Forever Wild, Saraland)

- Length: Varied - 6.2-miles of trail
- Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (due to length)
- Highlights: Great views of Bayou Sara on the delta and the ruins of an old Mobile Brick kiln. Primitive tent camping is also available. The trails are basically old dirt logging roads that you can connect to make your own out-and-back or loop.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No fees; Hunting is allowed in the fall so check on seasons before heading out. (See "In Addition")
- Trail Contact:
Alabama Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Montgomery, AL 36130 – www.outdooralabama.org

4. Chickasabogue Park (Mobile County, Eight Mile)

- Length: Varied – 14-miles of trails
- Easy to Moderate (Depending on length you choose to hike)
- Highlights: A great family park with paddling, biking, camping, hiking. 14-miles of trail interconnect to take you through a seasonal wetland, an old cemetery, and the banks of Chickasaw Creek. Drawback: Interstate 65 noise on the east side trails
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Day use or camping fee (visit Trail Contact); Trails are also used for bikes. Check with the office about which direction to hike the trails when you arrive so you can see them coming your way.
- Trail Contact:
Chickasabogue Park, 60 Aldock Rd., Eight Mile, AL 36613 - www.mobilecountyal.gov/living/parks_chickasabogue.html



5. Glen Sabastian Nature Trails (University of South Ala)

- Length: Varied – 8-miles of interconnecting loops
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: 4 trails make up almost 8-miles of beautiful walks through the woods on the campus of the University of South Alabama with interpretive signs dotting the path describing the landscape and a bit of science, past scenic wetlands with wildflowers and Lily pads. All trails intertwine to make loops of various lengths
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No fees
- Trail Contact:
University of South Alabama, 307 University Blvd. N Room 1, Mobile, AL 36688 -
www.southalabama.edu/departments/campusrec/facilityrental/naturetraildiscover.html



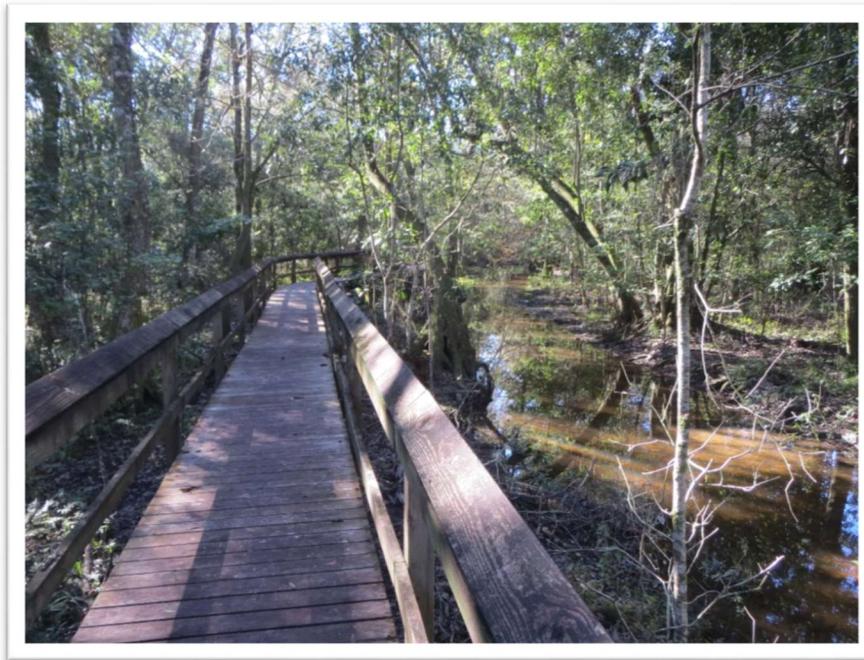
6. Woodlands and Gardens Trails (Mobile Botanical Gardens, Mobile)

- Length: Varied
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights:
11 grass, mulch, and paved trails take you through a wonderland of flowers. Meander through an amazing rainbow of colors no matter what the season - azalea, hydrangea, camellia gardens, hundreds of varieties of flowers like daffodil and cardinal spear, and water features like a natural spring and Thre Mile Creek, all within the city limits of Mobile.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Entrance fee
- Trail Contact:
Mobile Botanical Gardens, 5151 Museum Dr., Mobile, AL 36608 – www.mobilebotanicalgardens.org

7. Muddy Creek Interpretive Trail (Alabama State Docks, Theodore)

- Length: 2.5-mile Loop
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Part of a wetland mitigation effort by Alabama Port Authority to bring the wetland back, and they did an amazing job. ALL invasive plants on this 200-acre tract were pulled by hand to completely restore the wetland. The trail is dotted with long boardwalks that will take you across Muddy Creek, surrounding wetlands, and to a beaver pond. The path is also dotted with interpretive signs to teach you about the environment you're visiting. Off the boardwalk the path is basically a dirt trail with some sections covered with beautiful brilliant green moss.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No fee

- Trail Contact:
Alabama State Port Authority, 250 N. Water St., Mobile, AL 36602 - www.asdd.com



8. Grand Bay Savanna

- Length: Varied
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: The Grand Bay Savanna is a wonderful ramble through coastal marshes and maritime forests. The hike uses dirt roads and some boardwalk allowing you to view amazing wildflowers like the delicate snowy and yellow fringe orchids. An 1,100-foot board walk and viewing platform is the perfect site to do a little bird watching. It has been reported that out of the 445 species of birds identified in Alabama, 420 of them can be found here. The savanna is a prime research site for biologists from around the country. There are actually two tracts, one is managed by the Nature Conservancy, the other by Alabama's Forever Wild.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; No fees; Hunting is allowed on the Forever Wild tract (see "In Addition")
- Trail Contact:
Forever Wild Tract:
Alabama Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Montgomery, AL 36130 – www.outdooralabama.com

Nature Conservancy:

2100 1st Ave. N., Birmingham, AL 35203 –

www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/alabama/placesweprotect/grand-bay-savanna-landscape.xml

9. Audubon Bird Sanctuary (Dauphin Island)

- Length: Varied (3-miles of trail)
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: The Audubon Society describes this as one of the most significant birding areas in the world. 3-miles of interconnecting trails take you around beautiful Gaillard Lake, cross boardwalks through amazing swamps, and walk the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. Extend the hike with a walk to historic Fort Gaines along the beach.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year Round; Open dawn to dusk; No fees
- Trail Contact:
Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board, 109 Bienville Blvd., Dauphin Island, AL 36528 - www.dauphinisland.org/audubon-bird-sanctuary



10. Jeff Friend Trail (US Fish & Wildlife, Bon Secour NWR)

- Length: 1-mile Loop
- Difficulty: Easy (ADA Accessible)
- Highlights: This is a great 1-mile loop that's perfect for young children and is also ADA accessible with boardwalk and graded foot path that lead you through a wetland and along the banks of Little Lagoon. As of this writing the trail was being rebuilt and will re-open in the spring of 2018. The kayak launch here is still open.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Pets are not allowed
- Trail Contact:
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, 12295 State Hwy. 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 - www.fws.gov/refuge/Bon_Secour/



11. Centennial Trail (US Fish & Wildlife, Bon Secour NWR)

- Length: 5-miles if start at the Jeff Friend Trailhead, 6-miles if start from Pine Beach Trailhead (See HIGHLIGHTS)
- Highlights: The Centennial Trail is a 4-mile out-and-back hike but you must walk either ½ mile on the Jeff Friend to get to the trail making it a 5-mile hike or walk 1-mile on the Pine Beach Trail to get there making it a 6-mile hike. Either way, it's a beautiful walk in the spring and early summer when wildflowers and lily pads are blooming in the several wetlands you'll pass through and when Monarch Butterflies are migrating through. The long boardwalk could be underwater after hard rain
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Pets are not allowed
- Trail Contact:
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, 12295 State Hwy. 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 -
www.fws.gov/refuge/Bon_Secour/



12. Gator Lake Trail (US Fish & Wildlife, Bon Secour NWR)

- Length: 1.5-mile Out-and-Back
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: A 1.5-mile fine sand footpath past the fresh water Gator Lake over rolling sand dunes dotted with beautiful black eye Susan's, wild rosemary, blazing star, sand oak, and of course wildlife including dozens of species of migratory birds, monarch butterflies, and maybe an alligator or two.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Pets are not allowed
- Trail Contact:
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, 12295 State Hwy. 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 -
www.fws.gov/refuge/Bon_Secour/



13. Pine Beach Trail (US Fish & Wildlife, Bon Secour NWR)

- Length: 4-mile Out-and-Back
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: The Pine Beach Trail will lead you to all that makes the Bon Secour National Wildlife 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.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; Pets are not allowed
- Trail Contact:
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, 12295 State Hwy. 180, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 - www.fws.gov/refuge/Bon_Secour/



14. Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail (Ala. State Park/OB)

- Length: Varied (Over 15-miles of interconnecting trails)
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Over 15-miles of multi-use trails (hikers, cyclists, joggers) wind through the backcountry of Gulf State Park. You'll see wildlife (coyote, deer, alligators), wildflowers, birds, and wetlands. A restroom, boulder field, and butterfly garden is located in the center or "hub" of the trails.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; No fees; The trail is a paved multi-use path
- Trail Contact:
Hugh S Branyon Backcountry Trail, PO Box 458, Orange Beach, AL 36561 – www.backcountrytrail.com

15. Graham Creek Preserve (City of Foley)

- Length: Varied (Over 6-miles of interconnecting trail)
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: An amazing array of wildlife and native plants await you along the 6-miles of trail at the Graham Creek Nature Preserve. All are easy walking. You may encounter bobcats, coyotes, gopher tortoises and hundreds of migratory birds, plus swaying pine savannah grasses, flowering magnolias, and acres of beautiful white top pitcher plants.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No fees
- Trail Contact:
City of Foley, 407 East Laurel Avenue, PO Box 1750, Foley, AL 36536 - www.visitfoley.org



16. Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

- Length: 1.7-mile Out-and-Back at the interpretive center, 0.75-mile Out-and-Back on the Kurt G. Wintermeyer Nature Trail (Both are ADA Accessible)
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: Here's your chance to explore only a small piece of the 6,000-acre Weeks Bay Reserve. The reserve is called a "living laboratory" where the salt water of the Gulf of Mexico mixes with the fresh water of Mobile Bay, Fish River, and Magnolia River, to create a brackish blend that supports an amazing variety of animals and plant life. There are two trails at the reserve to explore this beauty. The first is located at the site's interpretive center. There are two parts to this trail. The first is a traditional dirt path that leads to a boardwalk and the banks of Weeks Bay for a panoramic view. The second part is an ADA accessible boardwalk that also leads out through the marshland to the bay. The second trail is the Kurt G. Wintermeyer Nature Trail, a long boardwalk through the marsh to view beautiful pitcher plants and Fish River. The nature trail is also ADA accessible. Before you begin your trip be sure to stop and visit the interpretive center for the backstory on the estuary and the research being done here.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No Fees; Interpretive Center is open Monday-Saturday 9am-5pm
- Trail Contact:
Weeks Bay Reserve, 11300 US Hwy 98, Fairhope, AL 36532 – www.outdooralabama.com/weeks-bay-reserve



17. Village Point Park Preserve (City of Daphne)

- Length: 2-mile Out-and-Back
- Difficulty: Easy
- Highlights: A 2-mile trail along gravel roads, some paved walkway, and boardwalk leads you to rich history, fascinating wildlife, and beautiful native plants along this National Recreational Trail that's perfect for all ages. The Village Point Park Preserve Trail winds along the banks of Mobile Bay where you can view alligators in the wetlands, take a walk on a sand island in the bay, and experience over 300 years of history at the massive Jackson Oak and D'Olive Cemetery.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; Open dawn to dusk; No fees; Do NOT allow your children or pets to frolic in the water! There are alligators here!
- Trail Contact:
City of Daphne Parks & Recreation Department, 2605 U.S. Highway 98, P.O. Box 400, Daphne, AL 36526
www.daphneal.com/residents/parks-recreation/



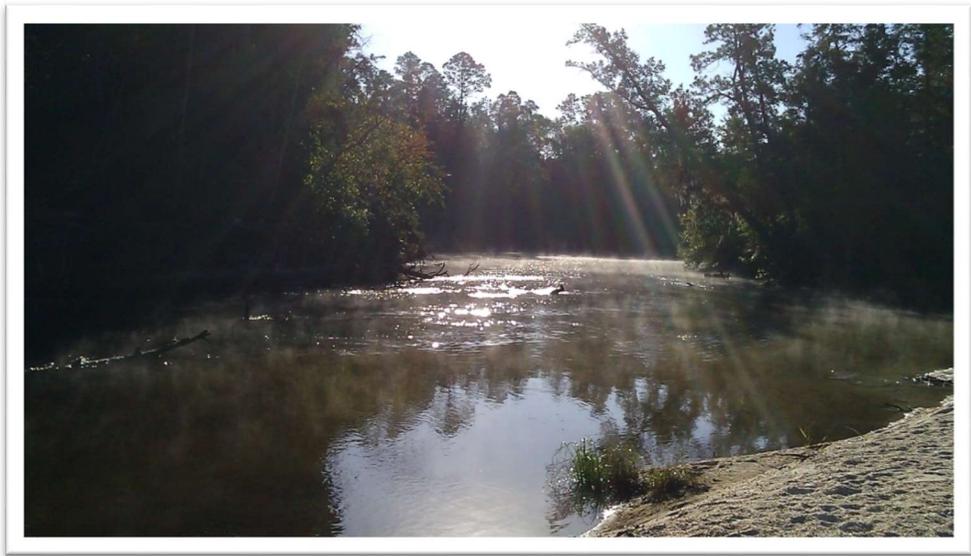
18. Blakeley Historic State Park (Alabama Historic Commission, Spanish Fort)

- Length: Varied (Over 15-miles of interconnecting trail)
- Difficulty: Easy to moderate (depending on length of hike and route)
- Highlights: Historic Blakeley State Park looks like a postcard of the archetypal South: long flowing Spanish moss hanging from the trees, shady walkways along the riverbank, expansive views of the second largest river delta in the country, and dark backwaters and wetlands. Almost 15-miles of trail take you to the “ghost town” of Blakeley that once rivaled Mobile as Alabama’s port city in the early 1800s and later it was the site of the last major battle of the Civil War
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round although mosquitoes and yellow flies are obnoxious spring through summer; Day use and camping fees.
- Trail Contact:
Blakeley Historic State Park, 34745 State Hwy 225, Spanish Fort, AL 36577 – www.blakeleypark.com



19. Perdido River Trail (Forever Wild, Robertsdale)

- Length: Varied (19-mile Point-to-Point or 38-mile Out-and-Back backpacking trip or an excellent 4 to 5-mile Out-and-Back day hike)
- Difficulty: Moderate
- Highlights: A beautiful little wilderness hike in the midst of one of the fastest growing counties in Alabama. Along the Perdido River Trail you get a good mix of the natural beauty of the Gulf Coast including Atlantic White Cedar bogs, a beautiful black water river (that's also great for swimming), and white sand bars. You'll also have excellent wildlife viewing. Watch for deer, turkey, bald eagles, and maybe an alligator to name only a few. The trail is the only one in Baldwin or Mobile County that provides a backpacking experience.
- Seasons/Fees/Notes:
Year round; open dawn to dusk; No fees (there are several trail shelters available on a registration basis for a small fee-see "In Addition"); The northern half of the trail uses old dirt logging roads; The trail can easily flood! Check the NOAA river gauges before heading out (see "In Addition").
- Trail Contact:
Trail Status: Alabama Hiking Trail Society, PO Box 235, Rockford, AL 35136 – www.hikealabama.org
Shelter/Property Manager: Alabama Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St.,
Montgomery, AL 36130 – www.outdooralabama.org



In Addition (Additional Information for Your Hike)

Perdido River:

- **River Stage Gauges:**

Flood stage on the Perdido River is 13-feet and the trail WILL be under water just before hitting this level.
Check the river stage before heading out at:

water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?gage=brpf1&wfo=mob

- **Trail Shelter Info and Registration:**

5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 30945 5 Rivers Blvd., Spanish Fort, AL 36527
(251) 625-0814

Hunting Seasons:

- www.outdooralabama.com/season-and-bag-limits

If you have any questions about these trails, other hikes in the state, or the Falcon Guides to hiking in Alabama,
contact author Joe Cuhaj:

Online: www.JoeCuhaj.Com * Email: JoeCuhajAuthor@gmail.com

Joe's RootsRated Articles on outdoor recreation and tourism in Alabama can be found online at:
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