

There are so many things to love about Birmingham. There's the food, the people, the climate, but for me the accessibility of nature is what makes this place home. I have spent months hiking around the country on some of the most notoriously epic trails, and some of my favorite moments and places in nature are still right here in Birmingham. I invite you to explore these trails and discover what makes Birmingham home for me.

-William Denniston, 2018

Trails Near Downtown

Don't have time to make it out to the mountain? These trails are easily accessible and enjoyable.

Jemison Trail

One of the most popular trails in the greater Birmingham area, the Jemison Trail runs from the intersection of Beechwood Road and Overbrook Road to Mountain Brook Village (Cahaba Road). Featuring both paved and gravel portions, the Jemison Trail is a low difficulty trail that runs straight through the heart of Mountain Brook. Running alongside a river, the Jemison Trail is personally one of my favorite places to run in Mountain Brook. The trail runs for almost 2.5 miles from Overbrook to the Village.

Lakeshore Trail

Starting behind the Target on Lakeshore Road, and stretching for 2.5 miles down Lakeshore, the Lakeshore Trail is a flat, paved path mostly used by bikers and runners. The trail runs beside a river for the first mile or so. Additionally, the trail is only about a mile down the road from where the Jemison Trail turns on to Cahaba Road. Every quarter mile on the trail is marked so it is easy to keep track of distance. Similarly to Jemison, the cross country team and I run this trail very often. Its accessibility and lack of elevation gain makes it a great place to pick up the pace on our runs.

Irondale Furnaces Trail

While this trail only stretches for about 3/4 of a mile, it is a beautiful and less-trafficked trail.

The IFT also runs alongside a river. There are many ways to get to the trail, but every trailhead

offers only minimal parking, so it is smart to turn this trail into an out and back or loop. The trail's official start is in Cherokee Bend on Stone River Road. The trail ends on Shane Drive (which looks more like a driveway than a road) but since this trailhead is more accessible for me, I often start there. You can also access the trail via a river crossing off of Forest Glen Drive at its dead end. As the river often floods, I would recommend using Shane or Stone River depending on your starting location. The trail is made up of crushed gravel, and also holds interesting history. The trail is at the site where the old Irondale Furnace once operated. I recommend stopping on your walk/run to read the sign beside the furnace.

Ruffner Mountain- One of America's largest non-profit nature preserves!

Ruffner Mountain is the first place I think of when I think about the Outing Club. It isn't about money or federal grants, just about preserving a spectacular plot of land. Just past Irondale on 81st Street South, the mountain quickly separates itself from the urban world below. The major thing that Ruffner has to offer is diversity. With multiple different trails heading to multiple parts of the mountain, Ruffner is one of my absolute favorite places to run, hike, and bike in the city. Additionally, it is incredibly accessible, being 15-20 minutes from the Altamont and Mountain Brook areas.

Quarry Trail

When starting your hike at Ruffner, you will immediately get on the Quarry Trail. The trail goes for 1.1 miles until hitting a Glen. If you continue on the trail from there you will hit one of the best overlooks in the city. The winter overlook looks over the quarry and the surrounding mountains. I also recommend back tracking from the overlook and heading into the quarry. Personally, I love going into the quarry and studying the fragile wildlife and bouncing around on the rocks. It offers a nice change from the red clay that covers the mountain. Want another short excursion? Head down the short and sweet Crusher Trail to check out the old mine ruins. The Quarry Trail

is easy-moderate in difficulty. (1.1 miles plus 0.5 one-way for the Crusher Trail and 0.2 one-way for the Overlook Trail)

Buckeye Trail

Not a quarry person? Head onto Buckeye! The Buckeye Trail dips down from the ridge into the wetlands. Once you get to the wetlands, I recommend taking the Lizard Loop or the Sandstone Ridge Trail, but only after walking around the bridge that runs over the swamp. I've seen many frogs, rabbits, birds, and one time a turkey down here. The trails down at the wetlands are flat, but very buggy during the summer time. Buckeye can be a difficult downhill, but remember to save some energy for the trip back up.

Ridge and Valley

Ruffner's most difficult trail. The name of the trail speaks for itself, one moment you will be on the ridge, and then a sudden drop leads you to a stream from which you have to trek back up. This trail stretches the length of the park and then comes back around to the quarry (leaving you 1.1 miles from the trailhead). The Ridge and Valley Trail offers multiple overlooks as well as Sloss Peak (the highest point on Ruffner). This trail is not as popular as Buckeye or Quarry, so there is less traffic which means more wildlife and more fun! (1.7 miles out)

Red Mountain Park

Two overlooks of Downtown Birmingham, 15 miles of hiking and biking trails, and 3 historic iron ore mines all close by in Homewood? Red Mountain Park is known for a lot of things, primarily the zip lines and climbing wall, but the trails are phenomenal. I frequent RMP for long distance runs and hikes.

BMRR Loop (Birmingham Mineral Railroad)

A beautiful walk stretching for 4.5 miles along wide and well groomed trails, the BMRR Loop is packed with history. You will run by some of my favorite parts of the park, including the SkyHy Treehouse, more mine ruins, and an epic overlook. The Treehouse is not an actual treehouse,

but just two chairs set up overlooking the park. I frequent this trail year round for long runs. We will run along the trail and loop back to the parking lot via the TCI Connector.

Grace's Gap Overlook

Is there anything better than overlooking the beautiful city of Birmingham after an amazing hike? I don't think so. Grace's Gap is the end point of the Ishkooda Trail. Along the way, you can check out the #13 and #15 mines. The mine ruins at Red Mountain bring historical context to the park. Over the past few years, RMP has grown a lot. I remember this first time I ran out there, no trails were marked. The reason I return time and time again is to catch a glimpse of that view of Birmingham, while also enjoying the narrow trails. RMP offers trails of all difficulties (the Ike Maston Trail being the most difficult and BMRR South being much wider and easier.) The quickest route from the welcome center to Grace's Gap is 2 miles.

Oak Mountain State Park

The mother of them all, Oak Mountain is Alabama's largest state park. The park contains Double Oak Mountain and the surrounding land. Go out I-65 and take the Indian Springs exit; get on Oak Mountain Park Rd and follow it to the park. Although it may be a longer drive than Ruffner and RMP, the drive is definitely worth it. Additionally, remember to bring money, as Oak Mountain charges \$5 per person for admission into the park. Note: Trails are well marked by color at Oak Mountain. If you think you are lost, keep hiking until you find a trail blaze, then evaluate.

Peavine Falls

Peavine Falls is one of the most famous hikes in Birmingham. Although it may be short, the hike is a little steep and rocks may be slippery. However, the views of the falls are all worth it. Make your way to the parking lot off of Peavine Falls Road by turning right onto Terrace Drive 2 miles past the park entrance, which leads to Peavine Falls Road. From the parking lot, a hiking trail descends to a bridge. As you get nearer to the falls, there are multiple ways to reach the base.

Once you cross the bridge, the Blue Trail is the easiest way to reach the base. If you feel like hiking slightly longer, you can continue on the Blue Trail until you hit a spur for the Peavine Gorge Overlook. Note: The Falls are rain dependent, so don't expect to see much if there is a dry spell.

Shackleford High Points

I don't think I can explain how much I love this hike. I went up here for the first time with my brother a few years ago, and we had a blast. It is worth saying that this hike is very difficult. Park at the North Trailhead and begin on the Blue Trail. As warning, this trail kicks off with a bang. You gain the first 400 feet of this hike's elevation in the first mile, with the last 100 feet being dealt out throughout the hike. On your way, I recommend taking the side trips to both Eagle's Nest and King's Chair. King's Chair is my favorite place in the state of Alabama. I love it up there. You feel secluded, away from the rest of the world, and that view is tough to beat, in addition to the sense of accomplishment you feel after completing the challenging approach hike. Once you get beyond Eagle's Nest, the fun begins. You have conquered the hard part of the hike, and now you are in the most secluded section of the park. In the many times I've been up here, I've only ever seen one person. This section offers incredible views and solitude. You may even be able to see some wildlife up here. From King's Chair, you have another 2 miles to hike until the Orange Connector. This junction connects to the White Trail that leads you along Shackleford Ridge. This portion of the trail is made up of rocky sandstone. Following the trail leads you to the Shackleford High Point. The White Trail then descends and intersects with the Yellow Trail. Follow the Yellow Trail through Maggie's Glen and back to the North Trailhead. This is a great hike, but also a challenging one. The loop is 7 miles. There is a primitive campsite at the Orange Trail Connector, so you could make an overnight campout out of it. If you are going to do it in a day as I usually do, bring plenty of water, food, and a good pair of hiking boots. Additionally, budget your time; don't take too long looking out over the valley

below at the overlooks. Especially on the section above King's Chair you will stumble upon many overlooks, but you have to remember to keep moving.

King's Chair Loop

If you don't have an entire day to go hiking but you still want to enjoy some good views at Oak Mountain, take the Blue Trail up as you would for Shackleford and take the spur that leads to King's Chair. The spur goes for about 0.3 miles off the Blue Trail. After you have enjoyed your View, hop back on the Blue Trail, and continue south along the ridge until you hit the Red-Blue Connector. The connector meets up with the Red Trail, which takes you back to the North Trailhead. Note: the Red Trail is a biking trail so be cautious of oncoming bikers. (5 mile loop)

Moss Rock Nature Preserve

Moss Rock is epic. Great hiking, a sweet boulder field, and a great vibe from the other people there. Moss Rock is out by The Preserve (a new developing neighborhood in Hoover.) Although it's about a 20-30 minute drive from the downtown area, the drive is worth it. A beautiful flowing river snakes its way through the preserve. The most common entrance point is on Preserve Parkway. This entrance allows you to enter right at the boulder field and hike around. The trails at Moss Rock are well marked with blazes along trees and rocks. I recommend wearing a sturdy pair of shoes if going out here. The terrain is often uneven, and can be rocky when increasing elevation. As the trails generally meander around the park, rather than point out trails, I'll talk about my favorite landmarks.

Boulder Field

Best part of Moss Rock and best part of Birmingham. I always choose to enter on Preserve Parkway because that means I get to spend more time in the Boulder Field. Thanks to a recent service project done by Altamont's own Matthew Hamrick, the boulders are graffiti free. This park offers bouldering for all skill levels. There are certainly places where you can climb up without crash pads with ease, while other pitches present difficulty even for experts. As soon as

you walk in you'll notice the massive boulders, so just start climbing!

Sandstone Glade

Right across the creek from the Boulder Field, you'll notice children playing, Enos hanging, and a sweet waterfall. The sandstone glade is a massive rock face that is easy to hike up. Trails continue at the top that lead out to western edge of the park.

High Falls and Top of the World Boulders

Once you get down to the White Trail from the Boulder Field, take a right and follow it until there is a bend in the river. Cross the river and continue on the Orange Trail. The Orange Trail takes you out to a few great sites, and is a less crowded area of the park. The Natural Bridge and Rock House boulders are exciting, but the real natural beauty comes when you hike up to the High Falls. This is a beautiful waterfall that seems like the end of the park. If you keep going up, however, you hit the Top of the World boulders, which is another epic spot to climb up and hang out.

I hope that this guide inspires everyone to go out and explore the natural beauty that Alabama has to offer.

For additional information, read *Five Star Trails Birmingham* by Thomas Spencer.