

FEATURE : Birmingham, Alabama: Hiking Trails

## Sweet Hike Alabama

*A great family hike is never more than 20 minutes away in Birmingham, Alabama.*



Fall colors in Oak Mountain Park.

Alby Headrick

Kids strapped in the backseat don't care about hiking among towering trees or lichen-covered rock outcroppings. Not if it means enduring a two-hour car ride to get there. ("Are we there yet?") But sometimes Mom and Dad want to enjoy a hike and enjoy their kids, not trade one for the other. Luckily, families don't have to travel far for a stroll in the woods when visiting **Birmingham, Ala.** Well-maintained trails within the city and surrounding suburbs will have hikers on a path suitable for the whole gang within 20 minutes. Here are three trails my family enjoyed when we lived in Birmingham.

At **Oak Mountain State Park**, visit the Treetop Nature Trail. We liked to start on the Wildlife Center Trail at the park's **Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** and work our way down to the Treetop. This made the trip longer for my husband and me, and gave our son, Max, who was between 4 and 5 years old at the time of our trips, something to look forward to: raptors. Red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures and other large birds that have been injured find refuge in an enclosed structure. An elevated boardwalk gave us an up-close-and-personal view. On the hike back, lizards and a small stream held Max's attention. The hike is less than a mile and can take up to an hour, depending on how much time you spend with the birds. A \$2 per person fee is levied during the week, \$3 on the weekend.

Alabama Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, [www.awrc.org](http://www.awrc.org); Oak Mountain State Park, [www.alapark.com](http://www.alapark.com)



Signs at the intersection of hiking trails at Ruffner Mountain.

Chris Denbow

**Ruffner Mountain Nature Center** offers a more challenging hike with the Quarry Trail, a mile-and-a-half path through hardwood trees and up the crest of the mountain, ending at an abandoned limestone quarry that nature has reclaimed. Max needed frequent rest stops, but trooped on in hopes of seeing fossils; the remains of small aquatic creatures can still be found embedded in the quarry's walls. While we didn't find any fossils on our trip, Max had fun scrambling over the rocks. Older kids and the more adventurous can climb up and explore the quarry's rim. We made the three-mile round trip in two hours, plus another 20 minutes exploring the quarry. Free.

[www.ruffnermountain.org](http://www.ruffnermountain.org)

At **Moss Rock Preserve**, enter the woods from the parking lot off Pattan Chapel Road. Within



A father and son enjoy a hike in Oak Mountain Park.

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by **Karen Gaspers**

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the first few steps, you'll cross a small stream on stepping stones, which immediately engaged Max. Paths are color coded; we usually took the white trail, which followed the stream. The water, rock outcroppings and fallen tree branches surrounding the path easily kept Max occupied during our hikes. His favorite spot was a rock located three-fourths of a mile in that had a carved-through tunnel. It was large enough for him to stand in, and perfect for pretending to be a bear. We usually turned back once reaching the rock, completing a mile-and-a-half hike in about an hour. Free.

[www.hooveral.org](http://www.hooveral.org)

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