



# BACKPACKING ALABAMA

By Dr. Eric Beck



BILLY HOPE

## ALABAMA CAN BE A DAY HIKER'S PARADISE.

BUT IF YOUR TASTES RUN TO OVERNIGHTERS, IT'S NO MORE THAN A SHORT DRIVE FROM ANYWHERE IN THE STATE TO GREAT HIKE-IN CAMPING WITH UNBELIEVABLE SCENERY, FISH-ABLE STREAMS AND OTHER NATURAL WONDERS TO TEMPT YOUR SENSE OF ADVENTURE.

Here are some of the best overnight trails (greater than 5 miles) in Alabama with a focus on the major geographic areas of the state.



### LITTLE RIVER CANYON

The beautiful Little River Canyon boasts both climbing and whitewater opportunities. The canyon also offers outdoor opportunities for the backpacker! Situated in the northeast corner of the state, the largest canyon east of the Mississippi River is easy to get to and a must see for any visitor to that part of the state. The canyon floor has trails extending some 20 miles offering amazing views of the canyon and river with numerous drop pools and – depending on the season – waterfalls. The canyon was given four out of five stars by *Backpacker* magazine.

**Getting there:** From Chattanooga or Birmingham take I-59 to Fort Payne Exit #218. Take Alabama 35. This will take you downtown. Follow the signs to Little River Falls. There are multiple parking spaces along the canyon and trails to the river along the canyon rim.



### SIPSEY WILDERNESS

The Sipsey Wilderness lies in the mid-northwest portion of the state. This area is the first designated national wilderness area in Alabama. Comprising almost 26,000 acres, the Sipsey Wilderness boasts numerous waterfalls, steep cliffs and ancient petroglyphs from previous Native American residents of the area. Trail 209 is 7 miles, and one of the longest trails in the wilderness. This trail follows the river and offers camping sites for the overnight traveler. There are options to tie trails together for a

much longer hike. Please see the links on page 22 for more resources on hikes both in the Sipsey wilderness and Alabama.

**Getting there:** From I-65 take the AL Hwy 36/Hartselle exit. Take 36 to AL Hwy 33. At this junction there is a store where you can obtain maps and additional information. From there take Hwy 33 South to County Road 6. Take a left on County Road 6 and follow the signs to the trailhead.



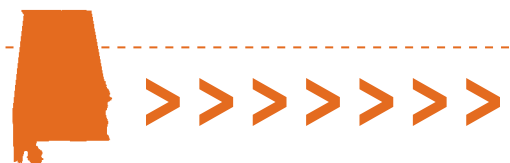
### PINHOTI TRAIL

With 100 plus miles of trails located in the mid-eastern part of the state, you can hike and backpack to your heart's content. The Pinhoti Trail represents one of the longest trails in Alabama. Meaning "Turkey Home" by the Native Americans of Alabama, this trail will give you all the backpacking you desire. I am not sure how many turkeys you will see, but solitude and ample wildlife is a guarantee.

The trail starts in the Talladega National Forest and travels through Cheaha State Park, home of the highest point in Alabama. As the trail is in the southernmost portion of the Appalachian Mountain range, there are opportunities for great views at some of the outcroppings and overviews on the trail and in the park.

**Getting there:** To get to the Cheaha State Park trailhead, go east from Birmingham on I-20 to exit 191 near Anniston. Take Hwy 431 south to Cleburne County Rd 131. Turn right on and follow this to Talladega Scenic Drive, AL 281. Turn left on Scenic Drive 281 and follow this to the Cheaha Trailhead, which will be on your left.

See the map on page 22.





## OAK MOUNTAIN

Oak Mountain is the largest state park in Alabama with 9,940 square miles of land. Backpacking opportunities are just a short drive from Birmingham in the central part of the state. Oak Mountain has four designated backcountry camping sites with a small fee for primitive camping.

**Getting there:** From Birmingham follow I-65 south to exit 246. Follow the signs to the park.




## CONECUH TRAIL

The Conecuh Trail is located in the southern part of the state. As the land is relatively flat, this makes a great place for beginning backpackers to learn the joy of trekking. Many people from north Alabama travel through the Conecuh National Forest when going to the beaches, but this is a great stopover no matter where you are going. The trail is about 20 miles and provides a good view of the southern Alabama geography. Cypress swamps and pools with longleaf pines show the beauty of the lowlands in south Alabama.

**Getting there:** Take U.S. Hwy. 29 southwest from Andalusia for 10 miles. Then turn left onto AL 137 for 4 miles. Trailhead will be on the left.

## SUMMARY

North, south, east or west, Alabama has a backpacking trail for you. So get out your pack and head to one of the many fantastic hiking opportunities in Alabama.

If you do not find what you are looking for here please check out the following links for backpacking opportunities near you. 

<http://www.800alabama.com/yooa/trails/hikingresults.cfm>

<http://www.alabamatrail.org/hikingAL/>

<http://www.hikealabama.org/>

<http://www.wilderness.net/>

<http://www.bamatrails.com/>

<http://www.wildernet.com/alabama/>

<http://www.sipseywilderness.org/>

<http://www.alatrails.com/>

## DOS AND DON'TS IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS



**DO** tell someone where you are going and your expected return time.

**DO** expect to spend the night even if you are on a day hike. You never know when you may have to spend the night in the woods.

**DO** follow the Leave No Trace guidelines when you are in the great outdoors. [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org).

**DO not** walk around mud puddles on the trail. This broadens the trail and leads to erosion.

**DO not** step on tree roots as this could harm the tree; it could also cause a fall.

**DO not** bring your dog unless animals are approved in the hiking area. Always make sure your animal is under control in the backcountry (i.e. on a leash).



### LOCATIONS :

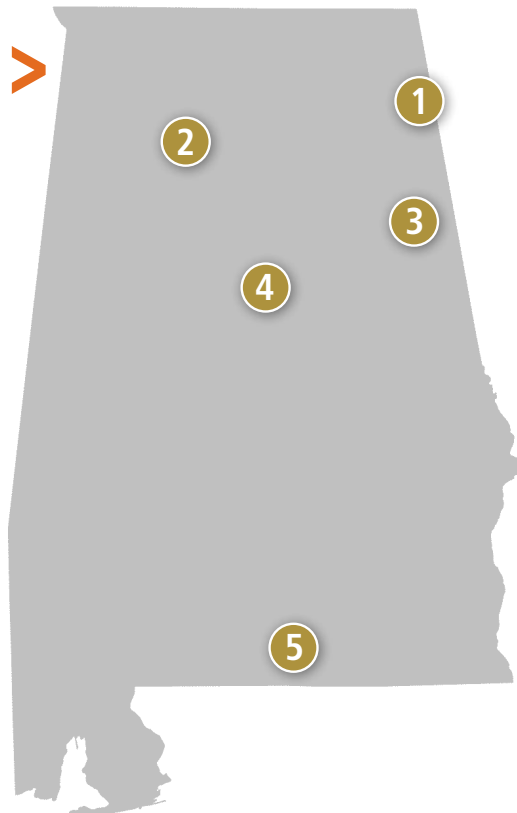
1. LITTLE RIVER CANYON

2. SIPSEY WILDERNESS

3. PINHOTI TRAIL

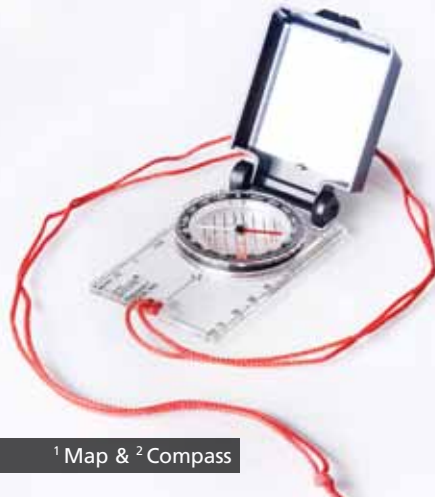
4. OAK MOUNTAIN

5. CONECUH TRAIL



# 12 ESSENTIALS

Before heading into the backcountry or any outdoor adventure make sure you have the Twelve Essentials.



<sup>1</sup> Map & <sup>2</sup> Compass

<sup>3</sup> Sunglasses / Sunscreen



<sup>4</sup> Fire Starter (flint/steel)



<sup>6</sup> Extra Food



<sup>7</sup> Water

<sup>5</sup> Knife



<sup>8</sup> Emergency Shelter



<sup>10</sup> Matches



<sup>9</sup> Headlamp / Flashlight



## ■ <sup>11</sup> Extra Clothing

What should I take? The weather determines your extra clothing selection. Colder weather will require different needs than warmer weather. Plan accordingly to be prepared for any situation.

## ■ <sup>12</sup> First Aid Kit

Along with the basic first aid kit you should also pack any medication you must have on a daily basis to assure your safety.