

Hello Ladies,

My name is Ashley Matteo, and I have been going to MBCC since I was in college (a long time ago). I'm married to Dan Matteo, and we're in the Fusion Community Group. We have two crazy boys ages 9 and 11.

With so many summer camps and plans cancelled, I wanted to share a list of some fun outdoor activities to do with your family, kids, or friends. My family loves to explore the outdoors, and I love it even more when I find a hidden treasure or a "road less traveled."

First, here are some **helpful tips** to make an outing with kids more fun and less daunting.

- **FOOD:** Bring more snacks and drinks than you think humanly possible to consume.
- **ENTERTAINMENT:** Make the car trip manageable with some audio books, DVDs, or some good ol' "Would you rather" questions.
- **APPS:** *AllTrails* is an app that helps find good hiking trails. *Trailforks* identifies mountain biking trails.
- **WHAT TO BRING:** Always, I repeat ALWAYS, bring an extra pair of clothes, a towel, and band aids. And please allow your kids to get wet and dirty... it's fun, inexpensive, and will really wear them out. Also, bring a bag for collectibles... this can make a hike or creek day seem way more interesting for your little ones. Then of course, refer to your Pinterest worthy friends to make something cool with these new "treasures."
- **TREATS:** Be willing to splurge on a treat at the end. A gas station ICEE, a drink from Sonic's Happy Hour (2-4pm), or a local delicacy from your adventure (Tip Top in Bluff Park, or Whistlestop Cafe in Irondale, to name a few).

I am always excited about exploring new spots, so please email or text me if you have a fun adventure to share. Also, if you have specific questions about any of these spots, feel free to contact me and I will let you know of any tips before you head out.

- Ashley

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PAVED BIKE PATHS:

Lakeshore Parkway

Jemison Trail in Mountain Brook

Rotary Trail from Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces

Black Creek Rails to Trails in Gardendale (5-8 miles)- gravel

High Ore Line Trail- Starts at the Venice Road entrance of Red Mountain Park to Midfield. 6 miles round trip.

Vulcan Trail- 1.7 miles

Chief Ladiga Trail in Oxford, AL (up to 60 miles)

ROAD TRIPS:

Noccalula Falls

Waterfall, picnic area, mountain biking, hiking

Covered Bridges of Blount County

There are 3 separate Covered Bridges in which you can drive over. My favorite one is Swann Covered Bridge. Good access to water play as well. There is a map that shows all 3 bridges within 15 minutes of each other. Another must-see in this area is **MARDIS MILLS FALLS**. You park on the side of the road and its about 1/4 mile walk to the falls and also has a rope swing.

Natural Bridge Park

You do have to pay to get to it, but the Natural Bridge is fun and there is a 1 mile hike that goes under a couple caves and is a very shaded hike. It's on your way to Smith Lake and Bankhead Forest.

Bankhead Forest Waterfalls

The parking for many waterfalls you see on Facebook is very limited. My two recommendations would be *Kinlock Falls* and *Turkey Foot Falls*.

Montevallo

Shoal Park- great for biking, hiking, and a fun creek. Also beautiful wildflowers at different times.

Orr Park- right behind Montevallo Elementary School and has really neat wooden carved tree trunks, a creek, and a large field with a paved walking path.

Falling Rock Falls- hike to a large waterfall- its about a 1 mile hike that is very flat until the end and then it's quite steep.

LOCAL PARKS:

Oak Mountain

There is so much to do at Oak Mtn and since you have to pay to get in, you might as well stay for awhile. It can get busy on the weekends but try going early, or during the week. Here are a couple of my favorite spots, that may be a little less crowded.

BMX track is fun for bikes, but there is also a great and easy trail that starts from the parking lot and goes to the dam and lake. It would be a great walk/hike for all ages and very scenic.

Maggie's Glen is another fun trail that takes you to a somewhat secret creek and a hollow tree trunk young kids can fit inside.

North trail head Lake trail is a fun biking trail that isn't too technical. Its the first trail on your left.

Flipside beach area at the North side of the park has an inflatable Aquapark and wakeboarding park if you want an extra special adventure.

King's Chair has the most epic overlook, but it's a steep climb and almost 5 miles round trip.

Red Mountain

Red Mountain has so many different types of trails and some really fun overlooks, but no water features so definitely go early if its going to be a hot day. Some of my favorite destinations are **Grace's Gap Overlook**, **SkyHy Tree House**, and the **Big Chairs**. They also have a new back entrance on Venice Road that is less crowded and a good way to ride bikes, or hike to either the Big Chairs or Grace's Gap. (Make sure to download their park map before you go). The Gas Station near the entrance is always a good spot for ICEE's after a long ride or hike.

Ruffner Mountain

The Quarry Trail has the best overlooks, but there are several fun and shaded trails throughout the park. You can access it from Irondale (the back side), or the main entrance (near Oporto Madrid). Its always fun to stop by the Whistlestop Cafe for lunch, or just a snack, and then let the kids sit outside and watch the **trains** come by every 15-20 minutes (there is a covered area with a railing to watch the trains).

Tannehill

Pack a lunch and plan to stay for awhile. Its a great spot for bikes: there are mtn. biking trails, or if your kids are younger they can just ride around the park and campground area. It is also a great spot for fishing and playing in the water. My boys' favorite spot is the Country Store where the candy is less than 25 cents, and the freshly roasted peanuts are only \$1 per bag.

Aldridge Gardens

There's a great 0.5 mile shaded trail with lots of spots to look out over the lake. Don't forget to bring some bread/crackers to feed the turtles and the biggest fish I have ever seen!

Botanical Gardens

We love the Southern Living woodsy trail to the right, the Japanese Gardens, and the Bamboo area. Lots of fun eateries in Mountain Brook to get a treat from afterwards.

Dunnavant Valley Hiking Trail that runs along a creek. Great place for all ages and definitely plan to find the Octopus tree trunk that leans over the creek. This trail is down Hwy 280 at the Tree Top Adventure and Soccer Blast turn off.

Moss Rock Preserve

We live close to this so we go here all the time and I feel like I find new fun spots just about every time we go. The main parking area near the restaurants leads you to the Boulder Field with lots of fun climbing and caves (it can be a little scary for the moms of little ones because the rocks are quite high). If you stay on the main trail it will take you to the creek, small water fall, and the Sandstone glade. Other parking areas are: Simmons Middle School tennis courts (takes you along a creek), across from Prince of Peace Catholic Church (power line trail that is flat and open), and my newest favorite spot is to park off of Verdure Road (you can access the High Falls, or go straight on the power line trail for pretty vistas). Make sure to stop by Tip Top Cafe for a bite to eat with an amazing view!

Black Mountain Mountain Bike Trails

Near Lake Wilborn (beginner and intermediate Mountain Biking)

Cahaba River Park

There are several mountain biking or hiking trails that lead you to the Cahaba River area with a small beach area and rope swing across the river. There is a covered pavilion with changing rooms and restrooms. I suggest parking at the pavilion and riding Rust Bucket and then cross over the gravel road and come down Flying Squirrel. Then take a dip in the river. I also see people bring kayaks there.

Turkey Creek Nature Preserve

Bring a tube, water shoes, or wear socks (the locals swear that socks give you the best grip). It is extremely slippery in some places. For young kids I would definitely bring a life jacket. Note that it is closed Monday and Tuesday!

West Blocton Cahaba River Wildlife Refuge

As far as I know, this is the best place to see the Cahaba Lilies that bloom from Mother's Day to Father's Day. It has a beach area and a rope swing. Also good for fishing if it's not too crowded.

McCallum Park

Playground, creek, hiking or mountain biking trails that lead up to Vestavia High School.

Vestavia Library Trails

Great place for a walk and a dip in the creek, and then a waterfall near Vestavia Central.

Ross Bridge

Has a partially paved trail with wooden train playground for the little kids. The trail does continue as a gravel trail for about 1.5 to 2 more miles. There is also a shaded creek and fun tunnel to look through. To access these trails, pass the main entrance on your right and continue on Ross Bridge Parkway for about one more mile until you see a gravel parking pad.