

# SHOTS AT THE PARK

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## Introduction

Growing up in Conyers, I often took walk breaks whenever I could, especially around my neighborhood. There was something incredibly calming about putting in my headphones, playing my favorite music, and disconnecting from any stress or worries for half an hour. Even as life has gotten busier with age, I still make time for those walks—just not as often as I once did. As my interest in photography has grown, so has my appreciation for the natural beauty around me. Exploring Costley Mill and Black Shoals Parks in Conyers, GA, I've found myself captivated by the quiet details and scenery that make these places truly special.

## The Scenic Nature of Costley Mill Park



**Costley Mill Park** was first settled by the Cherokee and Creek Indians. As a small group of white settlers migrated to Big Haynes Creek, the settlement grew to include the first school, a gristmill, a sawmill, a planning mill, and a cotton gin. This area became known as **Rockdale County** and Costley Mill. The name came from the owner, James Luther Thomas Costley.

The mill survived **General William Sherman's March** to the Sea during the Civil War. It burned in 1901, was rebuilt in 1904, and burned a final time in 1973. This was a tragic close to an era that began in the early 19th century.

Syl and Beverly Bowman purchased Costley Mill in May 1982. The Bowmans had a vision of the beauty it could be. They invested time, effort and resources into renovating the land, preserving the historical significance, and bringing natural beauty.

The site of Costley Mill Park holds significant historical value. Notably, it was once home to the **Bald Rock Baptist Church**, the oldest African American church in Rockdale County. Established in 1861, the church originally held services in a brush arbor before constructing a wooden building. In 1994, the congregation relocated to a new sanctuary on Old Covington Road. The original church building remained at the Costley Mill site until it was demolished due to disrepair.

The waterfall is a stunning highlight of the park. It cascades gracefully over layered rock formations into a calm pond below, creating a picturesque and tranquil setting. Surrounded by wooded trails and natural stone, it's a favorite spot for photography, quiet reflection, and outdoor weddings. With soft sand, a roped-off swimming area, and lifeguards on duty during peak hours, the beach is perfect for families and those looking to enjoy the summer sun. It's a rare find in inland Georgia and adds a unique coastal charm to the park's rustic landscape.



## The History of Black Shoals Park

**Black Shoals Park**, located in Conyers, Georgia, is a serene 650-acre park centered around **Randy Poynter Lake**, a reservoir constructed to meet the water needs of Rockdale County. The lake was developed by the Conyers-Rockdale Big Haynes Impoundment Authority, established in 1987. After obtaining a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1992, construction began in 1994, and the lake and dam were dedicated in April 1998. By 2002, the reservoir became the county's primary water source and was officially renamed in 2003 after the late County Commission Chairman, Randy Poynter.



Beyond its role as a water supply, Black Shoals Park offers various recreational activities. The lake supports fishing, kayaking, and canoeing, with amenities like a fishing pier, boat ramp, and picnic areas. To maintain water quality, gasoline-powered boats and swimming are prohibited; only electric, sail, row, or man-powered boats are allowed.

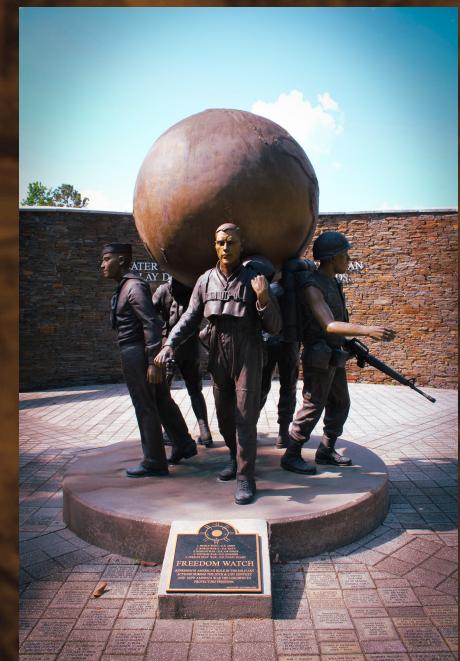
Today, Black Shoals Park serves as a multifaceted destination, blending its essential function as a water reservoir with opportunities for outdoor recreation, community events, and historical reflection.

## The Walk of Heroes Veterans War Memorial

**The Walk of Heroes Veterans War Memorial** was established to honor the service and sacrifice of United States military veterans and their families. Planning for the memorial began in the late 1990s, with the intent of creating a space where visitors could reflect on the cost of freedom and learn about the major conflicts in U.S. history. It officially opened in the 2000s within Black Shoals Park, situated along the edge of Randy Poynter Lake, offering a peaceful and reflective setting.

The memorial is unique in that it not only honors veterans but also educates the public through a chronological layout of wars, including etched marble bands that list years, locations, and brief historical descriptions.

A notable feature is the **Freedom Watch statue**, symbolizing all five branches of the military, which stands as a powerful centerpiece. Visitors can also find engraved pavers dedicated to individual veterans, making the memorial deeply personal and community-driven. The memorial hosts well-attended Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies each year, drawing people from across Georgia to honor the nation's heroes.



## Conclusion

Both **Black Shoals Park** and **Costley Mill Park** embody the unique blend of natural beauty and quiet charm that make **Rockdale County** special. As a Conyers-Rockdale native, these parks represent more than just outdoor spaces—they're personal landmarks that reflect the county's balance between rural peace and urban accessibility. Whether it's the tranquil lake and rich history at Black Shoals or the peaceful waterfall and summer beach vibes at Costley Mill, these places capture the essence of what makes Rockdale feel like home. They're reminders of why this community's landscapes matter—not just to the county, but to those of us who grew up here.

