**Cheaha Mountain, AL, 2,407 ft. – September 1, 2020, HP #41: This short trail lived up to its reputation of being steep and rocky, and it also involved negotiating several downed trees.**

Cheaha Mountain was the fifth objective on my six highpoint 2350 mile trip which both started and stopped in St. Louis between August 29 and September 6, 2020. Up to this point in the trip I had taken in a few sites in and around St. Louis, then captured Taum Sauk Mountain, as well as Mount Magazine, AR, Driskill Mountain, LA, and Britton Hill, FL. Following Cheaha my plan was to visit Woodall Mountain, MS, and then take in a few site in Memphis, TN. After not being allowed to camp at Marathon Campground in the Bienville National Forest of Mississippi I had gotten ahead of my itinerary. As such I found myself at Cheaha Mountain a day early, namely the afternoon of September 1, 2020.

I arrived around 5pm and arranged for a primitive camp spot in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) campground. After paying for camping, I was allowed through the gate of the Bunker Loop road and I drove to the summit to see the native quartzite stone observation tower named Bunker Tower, which occupies the highest natural spot of Alabama. The tower, like many things in Cheaha State Park was built by the CCC and dedicated in 1936. The tower rises approximately seventy five feet high on walls six feet thick. I was the only visitor but I only spent a few minutes as I planned to hike to the summit the next day.

After taking a couple photographs, I drove south through what I guessed was a picnic area turning left back onto Bunker Loop where I noticed a pool and restaurant on the right and a hotel on the left. From the country store/camper registration area I turned right and headed down highway 281 heading south for a couple miles until I came to Cheaha Road which leads to the CCC campground in another mile. I had been provided with a combination for the campground gate and once inside I found I was the only one registered for the night – awesome! This rustic campground is where the CCC resided when they were building many of the features of the park. The road was a bit washed out but I did manage to drive to my spot, only to decide to move to a different spot after worrying about a chance of rain. My original spot was at the bottom of hill and if it rained there was a good chance I’d get stuck trying to get back up the hill. As I moved spots in the dark, I heard a tree fall close by, which was thrilling however I didn’t see it.

The next morning, enjoying the peaceful solitude of the campground and with extra time on my hands I allowed myself a leisurely start to the day. It was after 9:00 am when I left the campground and drove the quarter mile to the adjacent Cheaha Lake also built by the CCC and completed in 1937. At the east end of the parking lot, just past the restrooms, I found the blue blazed Lake Trail that heads up the mountain in a north easterly direction. The blue blazed trail is only about three quarters of a mile long but gains over 800 vertical feet. This short trail lived up to its reputation of being steep and rocky, and it also involved negotiating several downed trees.  At the terminus of the blue blazed trail is a cliff area which offers some amazing views over the Lake, and its surrounding wooded mountains.

At this point I was still about eight tenths of a mile shy of the peak, so I connected with the Mountain Laurel trail (pink blazed), passing the old CCC reservoir with its rock dam and manmade falls, which led me into the upper campground a quarter of a mile below Bunker Tower. The old reservoir was built in 1934 to supply water to the park, however it is no longer used for that purpose. Cutting through the woods from the campground via the red blazed trail I quickly reached the highest point of Alabama. The slightly more than a mile and a half hike had taken me close to an hour and a half.

I had just reached the top of the tower when looking out the open windows I saw another party enter the building. Finding I preferred the view from the top of blue blazed trail, I soon headed back down pausing to taking in those views again on my return hike. On the return I located the stone marker labeled “Custodian” just west of the old reservoir wall. I walked the road from there to the parking area for cabins one and two. The CCC built at least ten cabins on the mountain that I assume are offered for rent today.

When I returned to the lake I discovered swimming was allowed which was a welcome way to refresh after a humid sweaty hike. Having the lake to myself I swam over to the diving platform. After jumping off the platform a couple times I swam back to the shore feeling clean and refreshed. After taking advantage of the restroom to change into clean clothes, I had lunch in the car before hitting the road in search of Woodall Mountain, Mississippi.

**Woodall Mountain, MS, 806 ft. – September 2, 2020, HP #41: This short trail lived up to its reputation of being steep and rocky, and it also involved negotiating several downed trees.**

It is 215 miles from Cheaha Lake to Woodall Mountain, MS, and I arrived at shortly after 7 pm. Summitpost states “One could probably pitch a tent or car-camp on the summit itself, however, it is unknown if this is expressly permitted or forbidden” and since I found no no-camping sign, nor no no-overnight parking signs, I decided to do just that. There was a kid on a motor bike that kept coming around so I decided to leave and return after dark. Returning I found a guy up there to use his CB radio, so I drove down a ways to see if another spot would be good for the tent. I didn’t like the other spot so I decided I would return to the summit and just wait him out. When I returned it seemed to me he got annoyed that he wasn’t alone, and he soon left. It was hot and humid, and I was anxious but I managed to sleep very fitfully for a while.

The next morning as soon as the sun was out, I packed up camp and tried to sleep a bit in the car (as the temperature was better) only to have a radio tower employee soon arrive at just after 7 am. So I drove down to where I had seen a view of the mountain, and got a few photos then slept in the car there for a bit. Next I went to the town of Iuca wanting to see the old Walmart (which had been remodeled so was not cool to see) and the apron museum which was closed. Next I checked out the historic mineral spring park, and drove over the covered bridge. Was hoping for mineral water but couldn’t find a place to fill jugs.

From Iuca to Memphis is only 120 miles and I had a motel room reserved for Friday. I stopped at the motel (Holiday Inn Express) and asked if they had vacancy and they did so I added the extra night to my stay. I was in need of rest so I just went out to eat at the Rock n Roll Café next to Graceland then returned to the motel and stayed in all evening.