**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 starting as thick as six feet. 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 south down highway 281 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 the 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 #42: It was hot and humid, and I felt anxious not sure if my sleeping location was foolish or not but I managed to sleep very fitfully for a while.**

It is 215 miles from Cheaha Lake to Woodall Mountain, MS, and I arrived at shortly after seven o’clock in the evening. I had used Interstate 20 west to Birmingham, which I was impressed to find nestled within wooded mountains. Interstate 65 and highway 157 (which becomes highway 72) got me to Iuca, MS. On the way, about thirty miles shy of the Alabama Mississippi border I noticed a sign for Muscle Shoals. Of course the line “Now Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers”, from the song Sweet Home Alabama came to mind, and because of that I really hoped I’d pass through the town, but my route bypassed it only getting me within three and a half miles of it. From the outskirts of Iuca it is just four miles to Woodall Mountain and signs from the highway 72 route 25 interchange pointed the way.

A 2007 article in the Mississippi “Daily Journal” claims the state of Mississippi was looking into purchasing or leasing up to two acres on the top of Woodall Mountain, however as far as I can tell it is still privately owned. A gravel road, which I found to be in good condition, arrives at peak from County Road 176. Along the gravel road posted signs announce the Tombigbee Hunt Club which owns the land encompassing the North Ridge trail. On the summit is a circular drive that loops around the Highpointers mailbox and bench, a summit survey marker, and a sizable rock with a plaque listing the elevation. The plaque also gives a short history lesson about the hill mentioning its name changes, and its civil war significance. Outside of the loop are several radio towers.

The website 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.” Since I found no no-camping signs, 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 postpone setting up my tent and to leave and return after dark. Returning I found a guy on his CB radio, so I drove back down a ways to see if another spot would be good for the tent. Finding no suitable spots to pitch a tent along the road I decided I to return to the summit and just wait him out. Upon my return the radio operator soon left, and I set up my tent within the loop in front of the rock with the plaque on it. It was hot and humid, and I felt anxious not sure if my sleeping location was foolish or not 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. At that point I decided to leave the mountain and drive down to where I had seen a view of it at sunset the day before. Reaching that spot I took a few photos then slept in the car for another hour or so.

Feeling a bit more rested I ventured into the town of Iuca to look around. I had seen a photo of a unique looking old Walmart and wanted to check it out. As it turned out it had been remodeled to look just like all other stores owned by the chain. My next point of interest was the Apron Museum which I found to be closed. From there I located the historic Mineral Springs Park, and drove over the covered bridge. I had hoped to obtain mineral water but didn’t notice a place to fill jugs.

From Iuca to Memphis is only 120 miles. ~~My plan was to check out the Chewalla Lake Campground in Holly Springs on the way, but I opted for a motel room instead~~. Since I had a motel room reserved for Friday in Memphis it seemed like a good idea to just head there and hopefully find vacancy at the same motel for Thursday - thus giving me two nights in the same room. Arriving at the motel I was happy to find they could accommodate me for the additional night. Watching TV and generally taking it easy seemed very appealing and I did just that only leaving my room to get some dinner at the Rock n Roll Café across the street from Graceland. Touring Graceland, Sun Studios, Lorraine Motel, and Beale Street were on my agenda for the next day.

**Woodall Mountain, MS, 806 ft. – September 2, 2020, HP #43: It was hot and humid, and I felt anxious not sure if my sleeping location was foolish or not but I managed to sleep very fitfully for a while.**