**Cheaha Mountain, AL, 2,407 ft. – September 1, 2020, HP #41: It’s not a mountain for sure, and it isn’t even much a hill, in fact Britton Hill is lower than sixteen other states lowest points.**

Cheaha Mountain was the fifth objective on my six highpoint 2350 mile trip which started August 29, 2020 in St. Louis and concluded September 6, 2020. 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 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. 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 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! 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 learning of a chance of rain. My original spot was at the bottom of hill and if it rain 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 CCC built a road, excavated for a lake with campground, developed hiking & horse trails, constructed 11 rustic cabins, a comfort station, a bathhouse, built the Cheaha Lodge & Bunker Tower, and conducted landscaping. The white CCC Company 468 SP-2 worked on the park until 1936; thereafter work was continued by Company 2420C SP-7, which was comprised of African American veterans of World War I. Learn more at https://www.alapark.com/parks/cheaha-state-park/self-guided-tour-ccc-buildings-and-historic-features

The next morning, enjoying the peaceful solitude of the campground and with extra 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 to the adjacent Cheaha Lake. From the corner of the parking lot, just past the restrooms, I looked the blue blazed Lake Trail that heads up the mountain finding it to be steep and rocky and with several downed trees blocking the way. The blue blazed trail is only about three quarters of a mile long but gains over 800 vertical feet. 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, and ending up at the upper campground a quarter of a mile below Bunker Tower. 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 half and a half hike had taken me close to an hour and a half. I had just reached the top of the tower and 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.

When I returned to the lake I noticed swimming was allow, 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 very clean and refreshed. After taking advantage of the restroom to change into clean clothes, I had lunch in the car before hitting the rode in search of Woodall Mountain, Mississippi.