

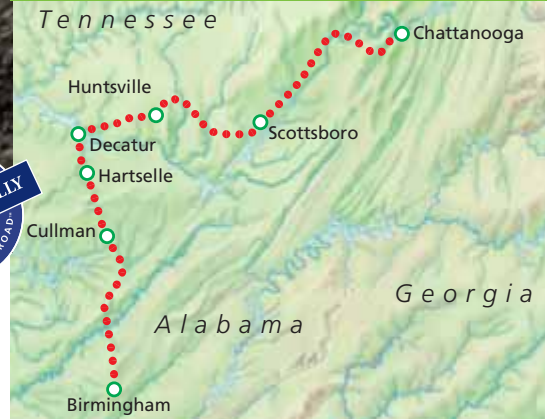
# Best of the Road<sup>®</sup> 2006



A Civil War cannon overlooks Chattanooga and the Tennessee River from Point Park.

The rolling landscape of the Cumberland Plateau and the long ridges and valleys of the southernmost Appalachians provide the setting for this Best of the Road<sup>®</sup> trip. The route stretches from Birmingham to Huntsville to Chattanooga — three family-friendly cities packed with top-notch attractions. Along the way there are Civil War battlefields to visit, caves to explore, and great spots for boating, bird-watching, hiking, and mountain biking. Topping it all off is the down-home friendliness of the people who call this area home.

## A Drive through the Deep South



For full maps of Alabama and Tennessee, see pp. 4-5 and 94-95 of the Rand McNally 2006 Road Atlas.



Vulcan raises his spear high into the sky above Birmingham, AL.

The first stop on the trip is Vulcan Park and Museum in Birmingham, Ala. Overlooking the city from atop Red Mountain, the park is home to a giant cast-iron statue of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and forge. The 55-foot-tall statue was commissioned for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and has reigned ever since as the symbol of Birmingham, although society matrons once considered its bare bottom scandalous. After falling victim to rust and stress fractures, Vulcan was completely restored in time for his 100th birthday in 2004.

Visitors can climb 161 steps or take an elevator to the top of Vulcan's stone pedestal, where an observation deck offers unbeatable views of Birmingham and the Jones Valley. Exhibits in the adjacent Vulcan Museum trace the history of the statue and of Birmingham.

Among the dominant features of Birmingham's skyline as seen from Vulcan Park are the massive silo-shaped blast furnaces and tall smokestacks of Sloss Furnaces. For more than 50 years, the smokestacks belched black smoke 24 hours a day as iron ore, coal, and limestone were fed into the 3,600°F furnaces to produce pig iron — as much as 400 tons per day. The furnaces closed in 1971, but thanks to the efforts of a group of citizens, the site has been preserved as Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark. Walking tours take visitors past monumental machines and structures that look straight out of Charles Dickens's England.



These smokestacks, stoves, and blast furnaces stand as monuments to Birmingham's industrial past.

original "shotgun shacks" built to house workers and their families.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Birmingham was one of the focal points of the civil rights movement. Visitors can learn more about this period by exploring the Civil Rights District at the western edge of the downtown area. The district's centerpiece is the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which tells the story of segregation and the struggle for civil rights. Across the street, Kelly Ingram Park displays sculptures depicting the confrontations between police, firefighters, and demonstrators that occurred in May of 1963.

A short distance south and east of the downtown area is the leafy Forest Park neighborhood, home to a funky gallery called **Naked Art**. "Naked" in the name refers a



Whimsy is a characteristic of offerings at Naked Art Gallery, Birmingham, AL.

lack of pretense. Owner Veronique Vanblaere, a native of Belgium, believes that art should be fun, functional, and affordable. Her offerings include lamps made from

recycled materials (\$75-\$200), belts made from computer cables (\$18), colorful handbags made entirely of duct tape (\$12-\$64), and soda bottles turned into hummingbird feeders (\$23). Most of the pieces come from local artists.

Some of the area's tastiest baked goods can be found in the upscale community of Mountainbrook Village. Continental Bakery — a little piece of Paris dropped onto Red Mountain — features croissants, brioches, cookies, and crusty European-style breads. Chez Lulu, which adjoins the bakery, is a small, bohemian restaurant that serves gourmet sandwiches, soups, cheeses, pizzas, and pasta.



Mouth-watering croissants tempt patrons at Continental Bakery in Mountainbrook Village, AL.

For anyone interested in the fauna of Alabama, one of the best places to visit in the Birmingham area is the **Alabama Wildlife Center** in Oak Mountain State Park. Each year, this wildlife rehabilitation center cares for more than 2,000 wild animals that have been injured or orphaned. One-way viewing windows allow visitors to get a close-up look at raptors such as eagles, hawks, owls, and vultures as well as foxes, deer, and other native critters. In the wooded valley below the Wildlife Center, an elevated boardwalk called the Treetop Nature Trail leads past a series of large enclosures that provide open-air homes for some of the center's largest raptors.



This orphaned fox kit was a recent patient at the Alabama Wildlife Center in Birmingham.

Leaving Birmingham, the route heads due north to the town of Cullman and one of the state's most unusual attractions: Ave Maria Grotto. Located on the grounds of a Benedictine Abbey, the grotto features miniature reproductions of 125 famous churches, shrines, and buildings from around the world, all nestled together in a peaceful garden setting. The grotto was a 40-year labor of love for Brother Joseph Zoettl, who came to the abbey from Bavaria in 1892. In creating these small masterpieces, he utilized materials ranging from cement and stone to jewelry, marbles, seashells, and even a birdcage.

Cullman is also home to one of the best-known dining spots in Alabama. The All Steak Restaurant, a fixture since 1938, serves a variety of mouth-watering steaks, including ribeye (\$17.95), filet mignon (\$18.50–\$24.50), chateaubriand (\$42.95), and T-bone (\$17.95–\$20.95). You don't have to be a steak-lover to enjoy a meal at the All Steak: the menu also includes excellent seafood dishes such as blackened snapper fillet (\$17.95) as well as chicken and pasta dishes. But if you ask any of the regular customers what keeps them coming back, they'll likely say it's the restaurant's famous orange rolls.



In Cullman, AL, Brother's Zoettl's miniatures include many of the world's best-known churches and shrines.

These delicious pastries — sort of like orange-flavored cinnamon rolls — are served warm with every meal.

A great spot for hiking, mountain biking, and bird watching lies about eight miles north of Cullman. Hurricane Creek Park is a 67-acre natural area highlighted by a 500-foot-deep gorge, waterfalls, steep cliffs, and dramatic rock formations. Several miles of hiking trails wind up, down, and around the gorge, crossing and re-crossing the Hurricane Creek via stepping stones and a swinging bridge. One trail passes through the spooky Twilight Tunnel, a dark, rocky crevasse barely wide enough for a person to squeeze through. For mountain bikers, the park offers easy-to-moderate wide-track trails and technical single-track trails. The park is part of the North Alabama Birding Trail, and birders might spot wild turkeys, little blue herons, turkey vultures, and any of 50 other species.



The Twilight Tunnel near Cullman, AL was created by an earthquake in the late 19th century.

About 10 miles beyond the park is the town of Hartselle, which was recently recognized in a national guidebook as one of the 100 best

small towns in America. The downtown area — with its well-preserved brick buildings, brick sidewalks, and old-fashioned awnings — looks much as it did in 1926, the year Hartselle was the site of an infamous bank robbery. Today, most visitors come looking for a different kind of loot: antiques. More than 30 antiques and specialties shops, with names like The Dowry Chest and Spinning Wheel Antiques, line Main and Railroad Streets. The Hartselle Area Chamber of Commerce, located in the old railroad depot, offers a map and



In Hartselle, AL, Depot Days festival draws big crowds each year.

guide to the shops. If it buzzes, bites, stings, or lays eggs by the thousands, you'll probably find it at **Cook's Natural Science Museum** in Decatur. This small, privately owned museum grew out of a large insect collection assembled by John R. Cook, Sr., owner of a local pest-control company. Originally displayed in a warehouse, the collection became so popular as a field-trip destination for local schoolchildren that Cook built a new home for it in 1980. Exhibits include termites, spiders, and exotic-looking butterflies as well as mounted birds and mammals, rocks, minerals, and seashells. Admission is free.



This stuffed cougar looks ready to pounce on visitors to Cook's Natural Science Museum.

A few miles east of Decatur visitors will find Mooresville, Alabama's oldest incorporated town. Settled by cotton planters in 1805 and founded in 1818, Mooresville remained small and unspoiled because it refused to let the railroad pass through. Today, it retains the look and feel of a 19th-century town, with tall cedars and magnolias shading streets lined with white picket fences and handsome Federal-style homes. The best way to see the town is pick up a guidebook at the tiny 1840 post office and stroll around on foot. (The homes are private residences and not open to the public.)



Mooresville's handsome brick church dates back to 1838.

The route continues eastward to Huntsville, a prosperous city filled with great things to see and do — most notably, the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, which exhibits an Apollo capsule and a full-size model of a space shuttle. Visitors to Huntsville will also find an excellent chil-

ren's museum, an expansive and kid-friendly botanic garden, an abundance of antebellum homes, and a historic district called Alabama Constitution Village. Somewhat less well-known is **Burritt on the Mountain**, a park that overlooks the city from the domed summit of Roundtop Mountain. The park's centerpiece is the X-shaped mansion of physician and inventor Dr. William Burritt, which features period furnishings and historical exhibits. Adjacent to the mansion is the Historic Park, a collection of 19th-century farmsteads gathered from throughout Alabama. Barnyard animals roam the grounds, heirloom crops grow in small plots, and costumed interpreters demonstrate period farming techniques and crafts. The nature trails that lace the mountain's woodlands lead past a large cave, old coal mines and quarries, and the site of a Confederate surrender.



A goat inspects the porch of the Meals House, circa mid-1800s, part of Burritt on the Mountain near Huntsville, AL.

One of the most interesting places to shop in the Huntsville area is located near Brownsboro on the east side of Monte Sano. Interior Marketplace contains some 35 shops, boutiques, and galleries operated by independent artisans and merchants. Under one roof but in an atmosphere that's much cozier than a mall, shoppers can browse for everything from furniture, rugs, and lighting to clothing, candles, and gifts. A popular dining spot called Café Michael represents another excellent reason to visit the marketplace. The café's specialties include salads with in-house custom-made dressings and the Café Michael quiche.

It's not surprising that the National Speleological Society makes its headquarters in Huntsville: The limestone that underlies much of northern Alabama is a Swiss cheese of caves, underground river channels, and sinkholes. One of the most impressive caves lies below



Near Huntsville, AL, Cathedral Caverns has one of the largest entrances of any cave in the world.

Gunter's Mountain between Huntsville and Scottsboro. Cathedral Caverns, which became part of a 461-acre state park in 2000, takes its name from a cluster of stalagmites that an early visitor described as a great

cathedral. Walking tours take visitors three-quarters of a mile into the cave as guides point out highlights such as a massive stalagmite measuring 243 feet in circumference and a stalactite formation resembling a frozen waterfall. Equally spectacular is the cave's entrance, which gapes 126 feet wide and 25 feet high beneath a thin ledge of rock.



You never know what treasure you might find at Unclaimed Baggage in Scottsboro, AL.

When airline passengers lose or fail to claim their baggage, where does it end up? In many cases, the answer is the Unclaimed Baggage Center in Scottsboro, AL. This unique outlet buys some 500,000 pieces of lost and unclaimed baggage each year, then separates the good stuff and resells it, often at bargain prices. In addition to aisle after aisle of clothes, shoppers will find jewelry, cameras, electronics, sports equipment, books, and (not surprisingly) lots of luggage. The Unclaimed Baggage Center ranks as one of Alabama's most popular attractions, drawing roughly one million visitors each year and media attention from the likes of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Good Morning America*.

Scottsboro's Goose Pond Colony resort park occupies a 360-acre peninsula jutting into Lake Guntersville. The park offers golfing, boating, fishing, and swimming as well as one of the town's best dining spots. **The Docks** is a laid-back waterfront restaurant that combines great food with panoramic views across the lake. Chef and owner Mark Hall serves simple dishes like Southern fried tilapia (\$9) as well as more sophisticated fare such as herb-crusted chicken with mango chutney (\$14) and Hawaiian grilled ribeye steak with pineapple relish (\$19). His signature dish is shrimp and grits (odd-sounding but delicious) served with andouille sausage and pepper cream sauce (\$16). Mark's mother Linda makes the restaurant's desserts (\$5), which include chocolate raspberry truffle cake and bread pudding.



Tiki torches enhance the romantic atmosphere of the waterside deck at The Docks, near Guntersville, AL.

Russell Cave National Monument, located just south of the Tennessee state line, was the site of major archaeological discoveries in the mid-20th century. When researchers excavated the floor of this yawning cave shelter, they found pottery shards, tools, weapons, bones, and other evidence of continuous human occupation dating back nearly 9,000 years. Today, some of the most interesting artifacts are displayed in the visitor center. The cave itself is off limits, but visitors can follow a boardwalk trail and peer into the entrance. Rangers lead tours to the entrance and present information about the cave and its former inhabitants.

Crossing into Tennessee, the route heads east to Chattanooga. Located along a bend in the Tennessee River, the city boasts a newly revitalized riverfront and enough attractions to keep visitors busy for days. Highlights of the downtown area include the Creative Discovery Museum for children, the historic Chattanooga Choo-Choo train station, an IMAX theater, and the Tennessee Aquarium, one of the largest freshwater aquariums in the world.



Humans have sheltered in Russell Cave at the Alabama-Tennessee border for almost nine millennia.

Another great area to explore is the **Bluff View Art District**. This charming neighborhood of museums, galleries, studios, bed-and-breakfasts, and cafés sits atop a limestone bluff along the Tennessee River just a short walk from downtown Chattanooga. Its best-known attraction is the Hunter Museum of American Art, which houses a large and highly regarded collection of paintings, sculpture, furniture, and glass. A \$19 million renovation and expansion project has given the museum a sculpture garden and a dramatic new lobby overlooking the Tennessee River. Across the street, the Houston Museum of Decorative Art displays antique glass, china, and furniture from the 18th and 19th centuries. After rambling around the district, many visitors head to Rembrandt's Coffee House, a European-style café offering fresh pastries, homemade chocolates, and a



The garden patio at Rembrandt's is one of Bluff View's most popular spots.

spacious garden patio.

Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga's most famous natural landmark, looms over the south edge of the city. At its base sits the St. Elmo National Historic District, which encompasses more than 600 properties listed on the National Historic Register. After exploring the district, visitors can grab a bite to eat at Mojo Burrito. This popular little restaurant allows diners to build their own burritos (\$5.95–\$7.35), choosing from a list of 15 or so fillings. Other menu items include quesadillas, vegetarian chili, and taco salad.

Lookout Mountain Incline Railway provides the most thrilling way to reach the top of the mountain. Built in 1895, the railway has the distinction of being the steepest passenger

incline in the world: Near the top, the grade reaches 72.7 percent — that is, the angle of ascent becomes almost vertical. Glass-roofed cars allow maximum enjoyment of the panorama that unfolds during the 2,000-foot climb, which takes about 15 minutes.



The Incline Railway has been carrying passengers to the top of Lookout Mountain, Tenn. for more than a hundred years.

Point Park, a few blocks' walk from the incline's mountaintop station, occupies the northeastern tip of the mountain. Part of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Point Park preserves the site of a famous Civil War encounter known as the "Battle above the Clouds." Plaques, monuments, and a small museum tell the story of the battle and the events leading up to it. The park also offers sweeping views that take in Chattanooga and parts of five states: Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

This tranquil park marks the endpoint of Lookout Mountain and a long line of ridges that stretches all the way back to Red Mountain and Birmingham, where this trip began. It therefore makes a fitting endpoint for the trip.

#### For additional information:

##### Vulcan Park and Museum

1701 Valley View Dr., Birmingham, AL 35209  
(205) 933-1409  
[www.vulcanpark.org](http://www.vulcanpark.org)

##### Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark

Twenty 32nd St. North,  
Birmingham, AL 35222  
(205) 324-1911  
[www.slossfurnaces.com](http://www.slossfurnaces.com)

##### Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

520 Sixteenth St. North,  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
(205) 328-9696  
[www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org)

##### Naked Art

3815 Clairmont Ave., Birmingham, AL 35222  
(205) 595-3553  
[www.nakedartusa.com](http://www.nakedartusa.com)

##### Continental Bakery

1911 Cahaba Rd., Birmingham, AL 35223  
(205) 870-5584  
[www.continentalbakeryandchezlulu.com](http://www.continentalbakeryandchezlulu.com)

##### Chez Lulu

1909 Cahaba Rd., Birmingham, AL 35223  
(205) 870-7011  
[www.continentalbakeryandchezlulu.com](http://www.continentalbakeryandchezlulu.com)

##### Alabama Wildlife Center

Oak Mountain State Park, 100 Terrace Dr.,  
Pelham, AL 35124  
(205) 663-7930  
[www.awrc.org](http://www.awrc.org)

**Ave Maria Grotto**  
 1600 St. Bernard Dr. S.E.,  
 Cullman, AL 35055  
 (256) 734-4110  
[www.avemariagrotto.com](http://www.avemariagrotto.com)

**All Steak Restaurant**  
 314 Second Ave. S.W., Cullman, AL 35055  
 (256) 734-4322  
[www.theallsteak.com](http://www.theallsteak.com)

**Hurricane Creek Park**  
 22600 U.S. Highway 31 North,  
 Vinemont, AL 35179  
 (256) 734-2125  
[www.hurricanecreek.homestead.com](http://www.hurricanecreek.homestead.com)

**Hartselle**  
 Hartselle Area Chamber of Commerce,  
 110 Railroad St. S.W., Hartselle, AL 35640  
 (256) 773-4370  
[www.hartsellechamber.com](http://www.hartsellechamber.com)

**Cook's Natural Science Museum**  
 412 13th St. S.E., Decatur, AL 35601  
 (256) 350-9347  
[www.cookspest.com/museum.html](http://www.cookspest.com/museum.html)

**Mooresville**  
 Decatur-Morgan County Convention &  
 Visitors Bureau  
 719 6th Ave. S.E., Decatur, AL 35602  
 (256) 350-2028  
[www.decaturcvb.org](http://www.decaturcvb.org)

**Burritt on the Mountain**  
 3101 Burritt Dr., Huntsville, AL 35801  
 (256) 536-2882  
[www.burrittmuseum.com](http://www.burrittmuseum.com)

**Interior Marketplace**  
 5732 Hwy. 431 South,  
 Brownsboro, AL 35741  
 (256) 539-9113  
[www.interiormarketplaceonline.com](http://www.interiormarketplaceonline.com)

**Café Michael**  
 Interior Marketplace, 5732 Hwy. 431  
 South,  
 Brownsboro, AL 35741  
 (256) 564-7007  
[www.cafemichael.net](http://www.cafemichael.net)

**Cathedral Caverns State Park**  
 637 Cave Road, Woodville, AL 35776  
 (256) 728-8193  
[www.alapark.com](http://www.alapark.com)

**Unclaimed Baggage Center**  
 509 W. Willow St., Scottsboro, AL 35768  
 (256) 259-1525  
[www.unclaimedbaggage.com](http://www.unclaimedbaggage.com)

**The Docks**  
 Goose Pond Colony, 417 Ed Hembree Drive,  
 Scottsboro, AL 35769  
 (256) 574-3071  
[www.goosepond.org](http://www.goosepond.org)

**Russell Cave National Monument**  
 3729 County Road 98, Bridgeport, AL 35740  
 (256) 495-2672  
[www.nps.gov/ruca](http://www.nps.gov/ruca)

**Tennessee Aquarium**  
 One Broad St., Chattanooga, TN 37402  
 (800) 262-0695  
[www.tnaqua.org](http://www.tnaqua.org)

**Bluff View Art District**  
 411 E. Second St., Chattanooga, TN 37403  
 (423) 265-5033 or (800) 725-8338  
[www.bluffview.com](http://www.bluffview.com)

**Mojo Burrito**  
 3815 St. Elmo Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37409  
 (423) 822-6656  
[www.mojoburrito.com](http://www.mojoburrito.com)

**Lookout Mountain Incline Railway**  
 Lookout Mountain Attractions,  
 3518 S. Broad St., Chattanooga, TN 37409  
 (800) 825-8366  
[www.lookoutmountain.com](http://www.lookoutmountain.com)

**Point Park**  
 Chickamauga & Chattanooga National  
 Military Park, P.O. Box 2128, Fort Oglethorpe,  
 GA 30742  
 (706) 866-9241  
[www.nps.gov/chch](http://www.nps.gov/chch)