

## **Alabama Highlands – 1937**

Narrator: Birmingham – metropolis of Alabama, population more than a quarter million – is called the Industrial City Beautiful. Approached from the south, it bursts upon the traveler in surprising glory nestled among lofty mountains. Rose vines line the highways; fine homes dot the landscape. One unusual residence is fashioned after the Temple of Vesta, in Rome, and is called Vestavia. Within comparatively recent years, these Alabama highlands, rugged mountains in the northeastern part of the state, have brought about an economic revolution. Alabama was once almost entirely agricultural, and her ancient *carte nomen* – The Cotton State – still prevails. But heavy deposits of coal, iron ore, and associated minerals in the so-called Birmingham District have changed the picture. From them now is produced one-third of the wealth of the entire state, supplying one-third the state's revenue in taxes.

For thousands in this progressive city, where congestion in living and traffic conditions is increasing, the need of state parks is urgent. The city has enrolled hundreds of Civilian Conservation Corps workers in the task of developing the Alabama state park system. The camp nearest Birmingham is at Bessemer, a suburb, and boys quartered there are developing Oak Mountain State Park.

Less than an hour's drive from the inevitable smoke and dust of this Pittsburgh of the South, delightful scenic vistas can be seen from atop this peak in the southern Appalachians. Early state park development included the building of trails, which lead visitors quite comfortably down around the waterfalls, as well as to other beauty spots in the area which consist of about a thousand acres, most of it heavily timbered. A road, the construction of which was especially difficult near the top of the mountain, gives easy access to the park.

Mountains are precious around this observation tower in Weogufka State Park on the southern tip of the Appalachian range. And because the park lies midway between Birmingham and Montgomery, only 60 miles from each, extensive use is expected. The water supply for the 400-acre area is from a small creek which has been dammed to operate a ram. Besides the tower, park structures include overnight cabins.

Fort Payne, the town nearest DeSoto State Park, has an interesting place in Indian history. Here the Cherokees were assembled to begin their journey to the western reservation, which most of them accepted in lieu of their lands in the Southeast. Sequoia, the Cherokee scholar accredited with having invented the Cherokee alphabet, lived near the town, and his wise council was administered to his people under this fine old tree. Here's a country of rugged charm, which has long been attracting visitors from distant states.

Above the state park property, the DeSoto River plunges over rocky ledges in waterfalls of majestic beauty. In caves gouged in the cliffs, early Indian inhabitants lived. In nearby mountain fastnesses, life is still primitive. Another of those difficult mountain road construction jobs has been a major project for the Conservation Corps here. In addition, the Corps has built various park structures – a lodge, overnight cabins, picnic shelters, et cetera – using native stone quarried in the area. DeSoto is already attracting hosts of visitors. It's on the main highway between Birmingham, Alabama and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the people of Tennessee take a neighborly interest in its development.

West and slightly north of Birmingham in this Alabama high country are Anniston and Gadsden, two cities with well-diversified industries where there have been unusual population increases within the last 15 years. From the main motor highway between Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia, just

outside Anniston, visitors are attracted [...] Cheaha State Park. Natives still recite an interesting legend concerning some sharp trading participated in by Indian Chief Cheaha in the matter of original ownership of this beautiful area. Government surveys have established that this observation tower, erected by Civilian Conservation Corps labor, surmounts the highest elevation in the state: 2,407 feet. In this park is more of the impressive construction work of the Conservation Corps. There's also another of those park roads winding up from the sultry heat of the valley into the clean, fresh air of the mountains. These simple, substantial backwoods roads are one of the Conservation Corps' important contributions to the proper development and protection of the country. A notable structure is a commodious bathhouse on the shore of a lake of fresh, crystal clear water within the confines of the park.

The Corps camp at Cheaha is not far from Fort McClellan, an important military post in the Southeast from which the United States Army directs its disciplinary care of thousands of Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees in the area. As such, it is a preferred proving ground for the technique and method which is applied not only to keep members of this new force in American affairs well and strong during the period of their enrollment but also to send them back to their more routine activities better qualified to meet whatever they may encounter.