

October 2016 *Wingfoot* Spotlight: A City Surrounded By Trails

By Tim Darnell

For a huge metropolis built on concrete and steel and completely dependent on the automobile, metro Atlanta has a lot of outdoor trails for its thousands of runners and walkers.



“I love trail runs and I love urban running,” says Nisa Sommers. “I like the urban trail run from the Old Fourth Ward, right on the BeltLine, past Irwin Market, crossing DeKalb Avenue and running right through the Krog Street tunnel.”

Sommers’ favorite trails on the Atlanta BeltLine also go by some of Atlanta’s trendiest restaurants, including Gunshow and The Shed. “Make a left onto Wylie into Reynoldstown, straight down to the end of Glenwood over I-20 on Bill Kennedy Highway and past the new Glenwood Kroger. I like to run as far as I want to and then turn around and come home.”

But for in-town walkers and runners, there are plenty of other options beside the BeltLine. Ultra-distance runner Jessica Rudd recommends Lullwater Park near Emory University. “There’s about a 5K’s worth of trails actually mapped, but I’ve found up to six miles of connecting trails hidden back there that aren’t even on the maps,” she says. “It’s right off of one of the busiest corridors in town, Clifton Road, but you get to run around a nice lake. I’ve run into deer on several occasions.”

Allison Fossey likes Lullwater Park, but “Morningside Nature Preserve is also a great one. It’s right in the heart of Morningside and Virginia Highlands area. Both of these parks allow you to do a neighborhood road run and attach some park space to your miles.”

Piedmont Park, in the heart of Midtown Atlanta, also features a four-mile loop over a mostly paved trail and hills. Besides being the place where the AJC Peachtree Road Race finishes, the park features a track popularly known as “the Active Oval,” a hard-packed gravel track that measures about 800 meters around. The park also connects to the BeltLine at 10th Street and Monroe Drive.

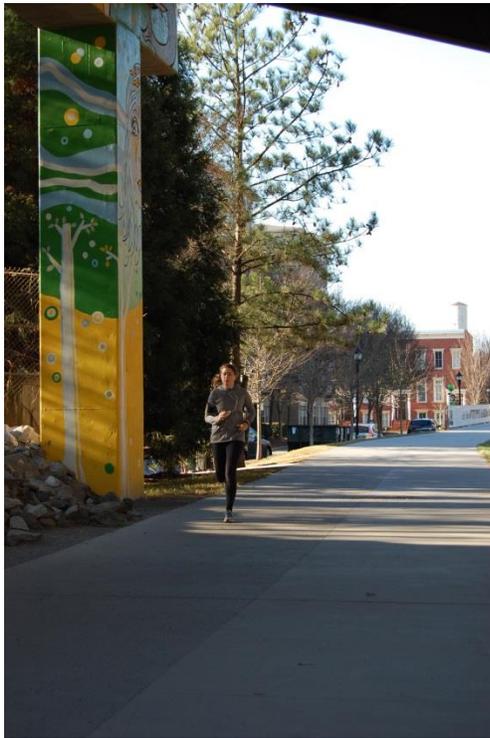


Outside the perimeter, one of the most popular trails are Cochran Shoals at the Chattahoochee River, where Jamie Kohm does most of his trail running. “The biggest thing for me is convenience,” he says. “With Atlanta traffic, it has to be somewhere that I can get to quickly.”

The Sope Creek trails are part of the Chattahoochee trails. “In the summer, I like the tree cover to block the sun. I’ll go to Cochran Shoals when I want something flat if I’m working on speed.”

The Chattahoochee National Forest, which is actually separate from Cochran Shoals, also offers lots of different trails, Kohm says, while Rudd adds, “There’s a few miles of flat and easy trails right next to the river, as well as a network of more technical trails connected in a neighboring park. You can easily do a 13-mile-ish training run.” The Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area has a 3.2-mile packed gravel loop near Columns Drive.

Moving farther into the suburbs is one of the PATH Foundation's first projects, the Silver Comet Trail. PATH began in 1995 with the building of the Stone Mountain-Atlanta Trail, the South Decatur Trolley Trail, the Westside Trail and the Chastain Park Trail.



In 1998, the Silver Comet BridgePATH created a partnership with the state, three counties and four cities to build a trail between Atlanta and the Alabama state line on an abandoned railroad. PATH raised \$3.65 million to match over \$5 million from public sources, building 35 miles of the Silver Comet Trail.

"The Silver Comet is flat and shaded, and all pavement," says Shaun Chang. "But the scenery is kind of boring and can get pretty crowded depending on where you enter the trail. It's also not so good for hill repeats." Kohm adds, "The Silver Comet is good for speed too, but Cochran Shoals is a soft surface and easier on the knees."

Kohm heads out to Kennesaw Mountain for high-mileage marathon training, going to and from the Kolb Farm loop and visitor center. "An added benefit to Kennesaw Mountain is the hills for some additional strength training," he says.

Runner T.J. Hadley offers this bit of warning if you're doing the Kennesaw Mountain trails: "Beware of horse manure; this is a trail open to horseback riders." Otherwise, "this is one of my favorite trail runs," she says. "It's a well-marked route but I like this trail because it is not crowded. You will see people walking their dogs, riding horses or out for a challenging run. It was my

first foray into trail running and I loved it. The peaceful quiet is soothing to the soul while the climb allows for a challenge. It is mostly shaded which helps to keep you cool once the sun comes up."

If you're stretching out even further into metro Atlanta, Rudd recommends Sweetwater Creek State Park in Douglasville and Red Top Mountain State Park near Cartersville.

"They both have great networks of trails and there are trail races of various distances held in these parks each year. I prefer Sweetwater Creek because there are some nice trails near the river, making for a good place to dip your feet. There's also an old mill rings next to the main trail that make for some great photo ops." Red Top Mountain is also a well-known spot for local triathletes for open water swimming.

Some additional metro Atlanta trail options:

Arabia Mountain PATH

7,000 acres of greenspace southeast of Atlanta. More than 33 miles long with several additional segments planned for development.

Carrollton Greenbelt

16-mile long circumferential trail around Carrollton, GA.

Nancy Creek Trail

Connects Murphy-Candler Park to Blackburn Park and Johnson Ferry Estates in DeKalb County.

Olde Town Conyers Trail

A trail from downtown Conyers through Wheeler Park and the Rockdale Career Academy to Johnson Park.

South Peachtree Creek Trail

Connecting Mason Mill Park's ball fields and parking area at Medlock Park to the historic Decatur Waterworks and the Tennis Center.

Panola Shoals South River Trail

Connects the radio controlled air field on Constitution Road to Gresham Park, Sugar Creek Golf Course and the Decatur campus of the Georgia Perimeter College.

Southtowne Trail

Connects the Brown's Mill Recreation Center on Cleveland Ave to Southbend Park on Lakewood Avenue.

Southwest BeltLine Connector-Lionel Hampton Trail

The Southwest Beltline Connector Trail system links Benjamin Mays Road and Willis Mill Road to the Atlanta Beltline Westside Trail through the Utoy Creek Natural Conservation area.

Stone Mountain Trail

Begins at Piedmont Avenue in downtown Atlanta and ends at Stone Mountain and Stone Mountain Park. The 19 mile-long trail does require on-street travel for almost four miles.

Trolley Trail

The old Atlanta-Decatur trolley line is now a trail that parallels Woodbine Avenue and Oakview Road past Coan Middle School into Kirkwood.

Westside BeltLine Trail

Connects Rose Circle Park to Westview Avenue along White Street where the BeltLine corridor is too narrow to accept the trail and transit tracks.

Suwanee Greenway Trail

Six miles of paved boardwalk trails north of Atlanta.

South Peachtree Creek

This PATH Foundation trail is located in Decatur, featuring rolling elevation on the trail's first half and a level, shaded boardwalk on the second.

Tribble Mill Park Trail

2.8 miles around Ozora Lake in Gwinnett County.

Murphey Candler Park Trail

An easy, two-mile trail around Brookhaven's Murphey Candler Lake.