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STONE MOUNTAIN LOOP


**KEY AT-A-GLANCE
INFORMATION**

LENGTH: 5.5 miles

CONFIGURATION: Loop

DIFFICULTY: Easy

SCENERY: Views of Stone Mountain and Confederate Memorial; gristmill; covered bridge; streams; lakeshore

EXPOSURE: Full sun around carving and in some areas where trail runs on granite; mostly shaded elsewhere

TRAFFIC: Heavy between Confederate Hall and Summit Skyride, light elsewhere

TRAIL SURFACE: Compacted soil, Chattahoochee stone, granite

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: None

HIKING TIME: 2.5 hours

ACCESS: Daily, year-round; gates open 6 a.m.–midnight; parking \$10/day. General-admission tickets allow access to all attractions (see website below for pricing).

MAPS: At entrance and Confederate Hall; USGS *Stone Mountain*

FACILITIES: Restrooms at trailhead and at most attractions; playgrounds, picnic tables

MORE INFO: 770-498-5690; stonemountainpark.com

SPECIAL COMMENTS: Stone Mountain Park has a laser show, a cable-car ride, and many other attractions.

DISTANCE: 7.7 miles from US 78 East/Stone Mountain Highway/I-285 East


GPS INFORMATION

N33° 48.639' W84° 9.714'

1000 Robert E. Lee Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

IN BRIEF

This loop trail takes visitors to most of the major attractions at Stone Mountain.

DESCRIPTION

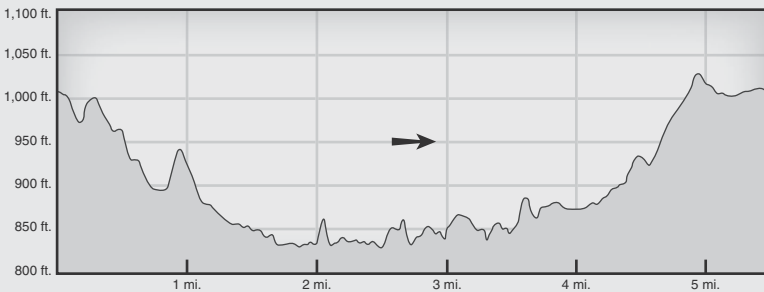
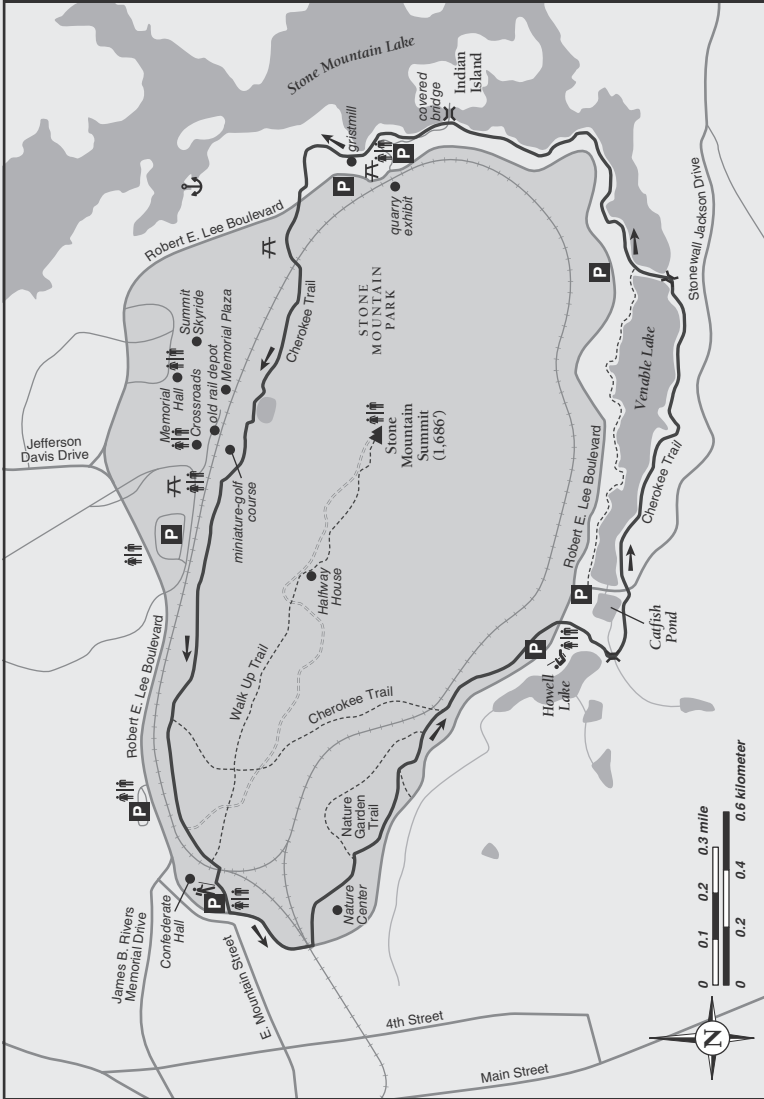
After parking, return to the sidewalk in front of Confederate Hall and turn left, walking Stone Mountain Loop counterclockwise. Follow the sidewalk 0.2 mile to a trestle for Stone Mountain Railroad. Walk under the trestle and turn left, entering the forest for the first time. At just under 0.4 mile, a path leads right, almost hidden in the summer months. Descend a few steps to two polished granite “bridges” across a creek. Return to the main trail and turn left.

Continue on the orange connector trail to a marked right turn at 0.6 mile. This is the entrance to the nature center, which has an interpretive display of plants native to Georgia. Among the trees are mulberries and white oaks. Plants include strawberries Christmas ferns, trumpet creepers, fragrant sumacs, and beautyberries. As you walk through the garden, keep a small building to your left and continue to the other side. Mulberry trees at 0.7 mile indicate the end of the nature center.

Directions

Take I-285 East to Exit 39B/US 78/Stone Mountain Highway (Snellville/Athens), and merge onto US 78 East. Drive 7.3 miles to the exit for Stone Mountain East Gate. The road curves right and then comes to a gate, where you pay the \$10 entrance fee. After the gate, this road is known as Jefferson Davis Drive. Continue 1 mile to a fork in the road. Bear right and merge onto Robert E. Lee Boulevard. Follow it 1 mile to Confederate Hall. Turn left and park.

Stone Mountain Loop





Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson forever ride on their favorite mounts in the famous carving on the face of Stone Mountain.

The footpath bears right, coming to an intersection with Cherokee (Red) Trail. Turn right and continue to the remains of a house at 1 mile. You can see the roofline cut in the chimney about two-thirds of the way to the top. There are wire cuts in a tree on the opposite site of the house as well. The path bears right at 1.3 miles, climbs a set of railroad-tie steps, and crosses Robert E. Lee Boulevard. Keep a green-fenced playground to your right as you reenter the forest. The trail circles the playground, turning left on a gravel road and then crossing the dam that forms Howell Lake. Step down into the cement overflow and climb a similar step on the other side. As the path bears left, a railed bridge crosses a creek at 1.5 miles. Just 0.1 mile later, the path crosses Stonewall Jackson Drive.

Venable Lake, on your left, is named for Sam Venable, who ran the quarry here in the early 20th century. About halfway around the lake, the trail bears right, crosses a beautiful stream with cascades flowing over a series of large rocks, and then bears left to return to the lakeshore. At 2.5 miles the footpath makes a hard

left, crossing an earthen dam and turning right on the far side of the lake. On your right is the largest body of water in the park, Stone Mountain Lake.

Just before 2.8 miles, Stone Mountain Loop rises around a rock outcrop, turning inland before turning right just before the road, and then falling to a creek. The trail becomes undefined as it crosses granite outcrops, but watch for white blazes on the rock. The number of trails to the lakeshore increases, and the covered bridge comes into view at 3.2 miles. African American bridge builder W. W. King constructed the lattice bridge in 1891. Originally, the bridge spanned the Oconee River in Athens, but when the Georgia Department of Transportation replaced the bridge in 1965, they offered it to Stone Mountain Park for \$1. The park accepted and moved the bridge to its present site at a cost of \$18,000.

The footpath falls to the lakeshore and crosses an outflow on two granite tablets. The path runs along the lake, inches above the water level and with a granite wall to your left. Watch for two sets of two granite hearts put in the pathway by an energetic stonemason. As the path curves left and away from the lake, concrete walkways replace the trail at 3.6 miles. The network of walkways offers views of the Stone Mountain gristmill, but head for the mill wheel and a boardwalk that runs next to the mill for a close-up look at the structure. At the far end of the boardwalk, turn right and continue uphill to a granite sluice and springhouse. Keeping the sluice on your right, cross a field and a small stream, turn left, and climb to Robert E. Lee Boulevard.

After you cross the road, the trail winds through second-growth forest, mostly oaks and beeches, and then climbs railroad-tie steps to cross the tracks at 4 miles. A nature garden, established by the Atlanta branch of the National League of American Pen Women in 1961, is on the left. After you pass under the alpine-style Summit Skyride cable cars, keep a small garage at 4.4 miles to your right as you circle right and climb to Memorial Plaza. As the path curves left, it turns to Chattahoochee stone, and the carving comes into view for the first time.

The massive bas-relief sculpture of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson was carved out of the world's largest piece of solid rock and represents the work of three sculptors over a period of 56 years. Gutzon Borglum began working on a concept for the sculpture in 1916, although actual carving did not begin until 1923. Borglum quickly ran into problems—not only with the creative process, which proved tedious and frustrating, but also with the other people involved in the project, whom he alienated with his explosive temper and domineering ways. Ultimately, he fled Georgia just ahead of a police car. Sculptor Augustus Lukeman took over in 1925, blasting Borglum's work off the face of the mountain. (Two years later, Borglum began work on another project, Mt. Rushmore.) Lukeman had made significant progress on the current carving when the project failed to meet its deadline in 1928. The carving sat unfinished for 30 years at the intersection of two rural highways.

When the state of Georgia purchased the land in 1958, plans were immediately set in motion to complete the project. Sculptor Walker Hancock was picked



A historic covered bridge crosses to Indian Island.

for the task, although Roy Faulkner, a former Marine with no prior experience carving stone, did most of the work under Hancock's supervision. Dedicated in 1970, the project was finally declared complete in 1972. On the right, across an open field, is Memorial Hall, which contains an excellent museum that highlights the mountain, the sculptors, and some local history.

Stone Mountain Loop reenters the forest as it leaves Memorial Plaza. On your right at 4.5 miles, on the far side of the miniature golf course and the tracks, is a re-creation of the Atlanta rail depot that General William Tecumseh Sherman destroyed in his 1864 March to the Sea. Behind the depot is the recently added Crossroads, an area of shops designed to resemble a frontier village, with areas called the Treehouses and the Great Barn, and a 4-D theater with a film about the Southern art of storytelling.

Past the miniature golf course, the trail runs between the mountain and the railroad and continues in a shortleaf-and-loblolly-pine forest on a frequently rocky path, occasionally moving into full sun when it climbs solid-granite outcrops of the mountain. The red-blazed Cherokee Trail heads left at the marked intersection at 5.2 miles; then Stone Mountain Loop runs adjacent to the tracks as it crosses a paved road and enters the Confederate Hall complex.