

# SWEETWATER HISTORY (RED) AND EAST SIDE (YELLOW) TRAILS

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## IN BRIEF

The Red, or History, Trail follows an old road through the historic city of New Manchester to Sweetwater Mill and then continues to an overlook of Sweetwater Creek's falls. The Yellow (East Side) Trail crosses the river and climbs into the watershed before returning along the river.

## DESCRIPTION

After purchasing this land in 1845, former Georgia governor Charles McDonald began construction on Sweetwater Manufacturing Company in 1846. He began producing thread, yarn, and cloth three years later; his textile mill was taller than any building in nearby Atlanta when it was completed. In 1857 Sweetwater was reorganized as the New Manchester Manufacturing Company, the name it retained until it was destroyed by Union troops on July 9, 1864.

From the trailhead kiosk at the east end of the parking lot, the Red, or History, Trail descends gradually to Sweetwater Creek, turning right at 0.15 mile and following the curves of the bank of Sweetwater Creek. The trail is a wide, level gravel road through a forest of American beeches, white oaks, loblolly pines, and sweet gums. Watch for a large square indentation on the right and an

### Directions

Take I-20 West to Exit 41/Lee Road, and turn left. Drive 1 mile and turn left on Cedar Terrace Road. Drive 0.8 mile and turn left on Mt. Vernon Road. Drive 0.3 mile and turn left on Factory Shoals Road. Drive 0.6 mile to the parking lot.



## KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

**LENGTH:** 5.1 miles

**CONFIGURATION:** Double loop

**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate except for the section between Sweetwater Mill and the falls, which is hard

**SCENERY:** Scenic views of Sweetwater Creek, falls, historic mill

**EXPOSURE:** Full sun–partial shade along the riverbanks, mostly shaded elsewhere

**TRAFFIC:** Heavy on the trail to the mill, moderate elsewhere

**TRAIL SURFACE:** Compacted soil

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** None

**HIKING TIME:** 4 hours

**ACCESS:** Visitor-center hours: daily, year-round, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; park hours: daily, year-round, 7 a.m.–sunset; \$5 state-park fee

**MAPS:** Available at visitor center; USGS *Austell, Ben Hill, Campbellton, Mableton*

**MORE INFO:** 770-732-5871; [gastateparks.org/sweetwatercreek](http://gastateparks.org/sweetwatercreek)

**FACILITIES:** Restrooms, picnic areas, pavilions

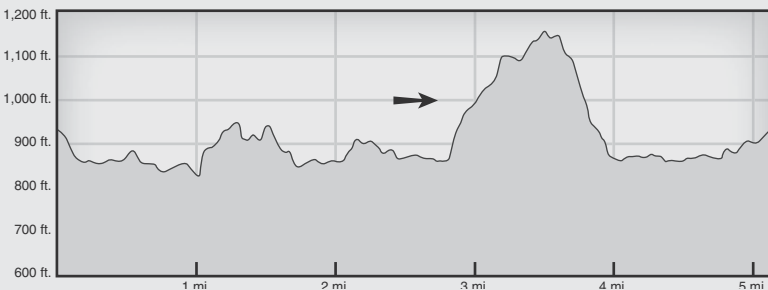
**SPECIAL COMMENTS:** Sweetwater Creek is one of the largest tributaries of the Chattahoochee River. The confluence of these two waterways is only a couple of miles from the mill.

**DISTANCE:** 11.8 miles from I-20 West/I-285 West



## GPS INFORMATION

N33° 45.201' W84° 37.708'





**The historic New Manchester Manufacturing Company textile-mill ruins, on the banks of Sweetwater Creek, can be seen from the Red and the Blue Trails. These haunting five-story ruins are all that remain of New Manchester, a mid-19th-century mill town that was destroyed during the Civil War.**

interpretive sign on the left that tells the story of New Manchester. Here Nathaniel Humphries ran the company store, which contained a post office and possibly a shoe-manufacturing operation during the Civil War. On the left is the start of the millrace that ends at Sweetwater Manufacturing. Almost immediately, a wooden bridge allows you to cross the millrace and explore what is now an artificial island. Return to the main trail and continue left. At the end of the island, the spillway is now used to divert the water from the mill in an attempt to preserve it.

On the left, at 0.6 mile, a wooden walkway before the mill gives you an up-close look at the power room of Sweetwater Mill. Notice that the old bed of the millrace makes a 90-degree turn between the platform and the closest end of the building. Water from Sweetwater Creek coursing through the millrace followed this curve into the power room, where it would turn a wheel to generate



**This bridge over Sweetwater Creek was destroyed in the massive floods of 2009. A new bridge, opened in 2012, restored access to most of the Yellow Trail on the east side of the creek.**

power. Machinery in the middle room wove the thread, yarn, and fabric, which was stored at the far end of the building to be transported to Atlanta.

The Blue Trail continues straight, but the Red Trail turns left after passing the mill and descends a set of wooden steps, quickly coming to the end of the boardwalk. From this point to Sweetwater Falls, we consider the trail difficult because it involves multiple trail-narrowing rock outcrops, and the trail is rocky and heavily rooted. A chain railing carries hikers across a particularly difficult area at 0.8 mile, after which you reach a wooden bridge and an overlook. Just over a mile into the hike, a series of rock outcrops narrows the path. As the trail curves right, into a cove, a massive 25-foot boulder seems to block the way, but wooden steps allow trekkers to scale the rock.

Hikers making it to the top of the rock are rewarded with an excellent view from the first of two platforms over the next 0.1 mile. Continue to the second platform for a superb view of Sweetwater Falls. As you leave the platform, climb the steps straight ahead and follow the Blue Trail to return to the mill. At the mill, take the Red Trail to return to the trailhead. Just before the starting point, watch for a side trail on the right with a yellow blaze and a brown hiking sign. Turn right onto the Yellow, or East Side, Trail.

The Yellow Trail begins an easy descent into a river valley, making a U-turn near a paved park road and running alongside a creek to a wooden bridge. Turn right, cross a small wooden bridge, and briefly follow the riverbank to a bridge across Sweetwater Creek. Built in 2012, it replaced a 1950s-vintage bridge that

was washed away by floodwaters in 2009. An antebellum structure, known as Ferguson's Bridge, spanned Sweetwater Creek in about the same place and was used to haul bricks and lumber for the mill from the far side of the creek.

After crossing the bridge, walk down the steps to the right. The footpath winds along the creek bank and comes to a wooden bridge. Shortly after the bridge, 2.8 miles into the hike, turn left on the Yellow, or East Side, Trail and begin an extended climb into the watershed of Sweetwater Creek. Over the next 0.8 mile the trail rises some 300 feet in full sun. Watch for a yellow-topped post on the left and three consecutively blazed trees. The signs are in place to ensure that you don't turn on the historic road, which heads left. Continue straight on the Yellow Trail to a right turn marked by a double blaze.

Still climbing, the Yellow Trail turns left at 3.4 miles, and a scenic view comes less than 0.1 mile later, after a marked right turn. As the trail continues around to the right, it comes to a bench and then bears left, beginning to run along a creek bed as it descends. In an area of rock outcrops and cascades, the trail rock-hops across the stream, crossing back onto a bridge a little later. Reaching the riverbank, the trail curves right and easily climbs back to the loop's start. Retrace your steps to Ferguson's Bridge, and turn left after the crossing. Following the bank of the river, the trail returns you to the bridge near the start of the Yellow Trail.

## NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Inside Sweetwater Creek State Park, **George H. Sparks Reservoir** (770-732-5871; [gastateparks.org/sweetwatercreek](http://gastateparks.org/sweetwatercreek)) is a great place to take the kids fishing for bream, crappie, catfish, and the occasional bass. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, which manages the 215-acre reservoir, has added brush along the banks to make them fish-friendly. You can also rent an electric-powered boat for an off-shore adventure.