

A Tourist in Northeast Alabama

In February, I took a Sunday off and simply did some touristy sightseeing. This might give you a flavor of several Alabama locations.



One of the things that impresses me about this area is the number of “lakes” – mostly dammed rivers. For example here’s Guntersville Lake which is a section of the Tennessee River.

This has obviously led to quite a bit of river and lakefront development, with a corresponding increase in local income. (I’m sure this has changed Alabama as much as desegregation over the past 50 years.) For example, this marina is actually a private sailing club with a large collection of very nice boats.



Yet, some old traditions remain. On the right is one building – in the Arts & Crafts style – of a school founded by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1924 in the small town of Grant.

It’s now a regular public school with about 1100 students, but still partially funded by the DAR. It’s interesting to note that the DAR website still mentions “serving impoverished Appalachian Children.” From what I saw of the area, I’ll bet that’s partially fund-raising hype as the economy is swinging away from it’s rural roots.



The school is perched on Gunter Mountain and overlooks this valley (hollow / cove).

Many of the old communities (now just off major highways) were called “coves.” (Webster: *a level area sheltered by hills or mountains*) This barn in Kennamer Cove is the quintessence of rural old Alabama. (By coincidence, that “q” word is today’s “Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Day.”)



My first big stop was Cathedral Cavern. This hole in the ground was privately owned (although well maintained) until the state parks took it over and reopened it in 2000. Our tour guide was the park manager who could talk really “southern” (when he wanted to bring laughter from us tourists – I was the only Yankee in the group). The new word I learned was “cmoan” (with the c barely heard.) As in, “I’m moving to the next room, ya’ll cmoan” (come along). It has the largest cave entrance in the world (or so they think). It also has a stream running much of its length.



Then I headed west about 40 miles to Ave Maria Grotto on the grounds of a Benedictine Monastery. In the early to mid 1900s, one of the brothers shoveled coal for the power plant during the day and in his spare time built small shrines and building replicas from found objects – pieces of tile, dishes, shells, small statues, etc. The building replicas fill a hillside of an old quarry.



Top left: Temple of the Fairies
Top right: Jerusalem Temple
Middle left: Old Jerusalem
Middle right: Hillside of Miniatures
Left: St. Peter's Church in Rome

The increase in Alabama business and income has greatly improved the roads throughout much of the portion of the state that I've been able to see. By keeping forest buffers of 50 to 200 feet along most of the freeways wherever possible, it continues to look like a rural, forested state. They're even getting rid of the last vestige of concrete freeway that is solid and not broken but still drives like a corduroy road. I didn't know concrete could be so "washboardy."



Bridge over Tennessee River
and Guntersville Lake



Paint Rock, Alabama

Near the cavern is a small town called Paint Rock. Out by the highway, a furniture store has set out these rocks for the locals to splash paint on. So, as you can see, these are the painted rocks of Paint Rock.

I hope you'll come with me on some of my other mini-trips. They're now located on my website at: www.photobyfabian.com/travelogues/

Art Fabian – February, 2006