

# Natural, Scenic, and Historic Sites to Consider for Future Parks

## Bluff Park Preserve



View across Shades Valley from Lover's Leap



Tip Top Grill



Rock formations near Hale Springs

## South & North Alabama Railroad Greenways



Ross Creek Stone Culvert



Cut through Pine Mountain at Brock's Gap



Billy Gould Coke Ovens



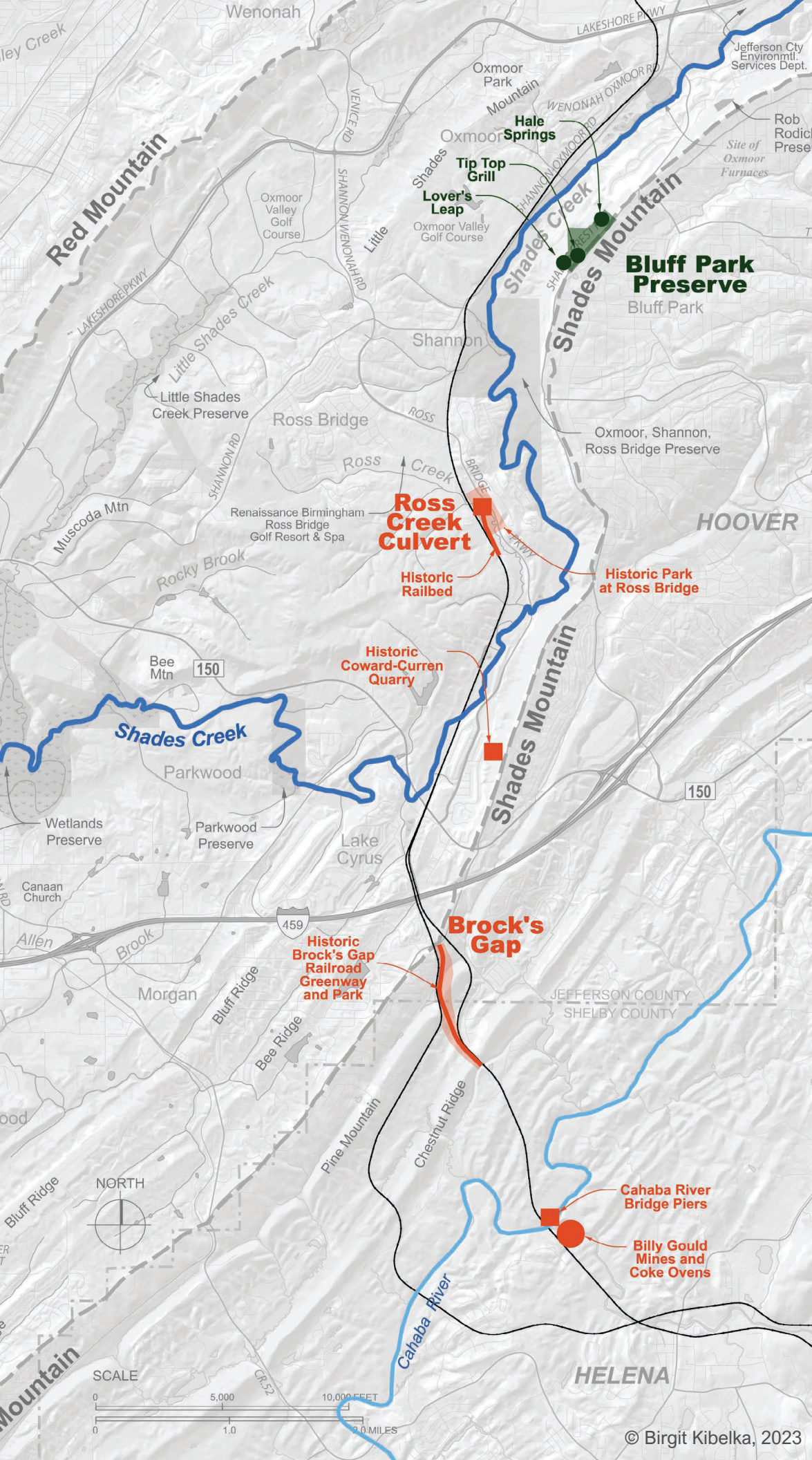
South & North Alabama RR embankment above Ross Creek



Brock's Gap: Tall fill bridging the valley between Shades and Pine Mountains



South & North Alabama RR pier in the Cahaba River





# Birmingham Historical Society

## Natural, Scenic, and Historic Sites to Consider for Future Parks



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### Bluff Park Preserve

**Lover's Leap**  
**Hales Springs**  
**Tip Top Grill site**

**The opportunity:** Dramatic scenic views across Shades Valley at the hard rock summit of Shades Mt. in the heart of Bluff Park, one of few publicly accessible sites at the mountain's crest

#### Recommendations in previous plans:

Boston land planner Warren Manning in his plan for *The Future Greater Birmingham District* of 1916, published 1919, included The Bluff Top and Bluff Reservation along Shades Mountain's crest. The term "reservation" was used to draw attention to the natural and scenic resources along ridges that called out for special consideration.

Olmsted Brothers' proposed plan *A Park System for Birmingham*, published in 1925, expanded Manning's vision and emphasized the need for saving scenic and health enhancing ridge top land. Why? To secure natural "unspoiled landscape in advance of private development and reserve it for perpetual use and enjoyment." The Park of Metropolitan Scale, X on the 1925 plan, provided for preservation of "perhaps the best opportunity for enclosed natural landscape and inspiring broad outlook in the Birmingham district...Its wild character must be faithfully guarded against all encroachments."

**History:** Visitors to this mountain top site have been coming for 200 years. By the 1850s and continuing into the early 20th century, the Hale Springs-Bluff Park summer resort community here attracted paying guests to take in the cool mountain air and medicinal spring waters. And the Bluff Park residential community grew nearby. The 1910 Hale home, long owned by the Gardner Hale and Carlo Joseph families, is currently property of the City of Hoover. At the instigation of Thomas Martin and George B. Ward, the Lover's Leap historic site was donated to the public by Jones W. Schwab in 1935.

At the site appear the following words:

*To sit on the rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell, to slowly trace the forest's shady scene where things that own not man's dominion dwell, and mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been.*

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published between 1812 and 1818, Lord Byron

### South & North Alabama Railway

Chartered in 1854, the state-sponsored railway was intended to link the capital at Montgomery to the Tennessee River and open development of the mineral resources along the route. While coal mining and coke making began at the Billy Gould site in the 1860s, the passage through the hard rock summit of Shades Mountain at Brock's Gap eluded the railway builders until 1871. Completion of the railway led to the founding of Birmingham and the development of mineral resources into the iron, steel and foundries industries, the economic engines supporting 100 years of regional growth. In 1872, the L & N Railroad acquired the South & North and completed the line, linking it into that railroad's extensive system.

Portions of the historic railway bed remain, extending from the site of the Oxmoor furnaces across today's Hoover to Helena in Shelby County.

#### Ross Creek Culvert and Railway, c. 1864

This Civil War-era railway culvert and trail, located in the Historic Park at Ross Bridge adjacent the Ross Bridge Parkway, is a rare surviving remnant of railroad construction that served a nascent iron industry. The stone culvert conducted Ross Creek under the embankment for the South & North Alabama and later the L & N railroad mainline from 1871 to 1908. The route then served as a spur line to the Oxmoor Furnaces from 1908 to 1927. In 2017, the Historic American Engineering Record of the National Park Service documented the site as HAER AL-214.

#### Brock's Gap, 1871

The extant one-mile-forested road along the railbed between S. Shades Crest Road and Stadium Trace Parkway passes through three ridges at the hard rock summit of Shades Mt. Named for Pinckney L. Brock who acquired the gap in 1858, Brock's Gap is a natural pass through which Native American trails, the Montevallo Road—a 19th century wagon route—and the South & North Alabama Railroad have passed. To the north and south of Shades Crest Road, the original cut through the hard Shades Mountain sandstone rock lies much lower than the road, creating a now wooded, secluded canyon with walls up to 30' high.

#### Cahaba River Bridge Piers, c. 1864

These remnants of this Civil War era railway bridge across the Cahaba River were built for the South & North Alabama Railroad, and later served the L & N mainline.

#### Billy Gould Coal Mine and Coke Ovens, 1860s

This Civil War era industrial site at the confluence of Buck Creek and the Cahaba River, near Helena, is currently under consideration as a city park. The Historic American Engineering Record documented the site as HAER-AL-16 in 1992. Possibly the oldest remaining coke ovens in the United States, the twelve stone Gould Ovens operated during and after the Civil War and may have provided coke for the 1870s Oxmoor experiments that proved Birmingham raw materials suitable for large-scale ironmaking.

For a listing of other historic sites in Hoover, [see this map by the Hoover Historical Society](#).

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Map: Birgit Kibelka

Photos: top row Hunter Nichols, 2017; bottom rows: left: Jet Lowe, 2017 (HAER AL-214-1, AL-214-8), center: Birgit Kibelka, 2021, right: Robert Yuill

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