

HIKE HUNTSVILLE

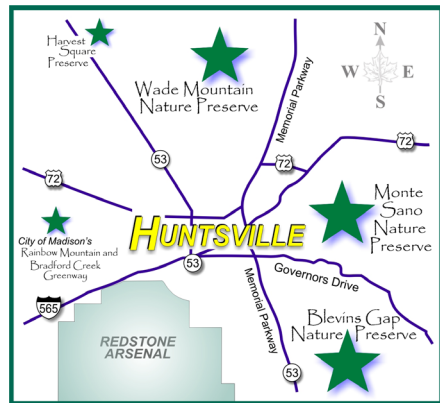
Old Railroad Bed Trail

The Land Trust's Bankhead hiker's parking lot is three miles from the intersection of Memorial Parkway and University Drive - which changes to Pratt Avenue.

Go east on Pratt Ave.

through Five Points business district and continue straight as Pratt changes to Bankhead Parkway. Parking lot is 1/2 mile past Toll Gate Road on the right and has a stone marker at the entrance.

(Access to Alms House, Bluff Line, Toll Gate, Fagan Springs, and Old Railroad Bed Trails. Trails open dawn to dusk. Pets welcome on leads.)



Visit our other Nature Preserves and enjoy more of North Alabama's natural beauty. Maps available at www.LandTrustNAL.org

Over 50 hotels and motels offer lodging at reasonable rates.

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- Dennis Keim



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Welcome

to the Land Trust of North Alabama's Monte Sano Nature Preserve Old Railroad Bed Trail

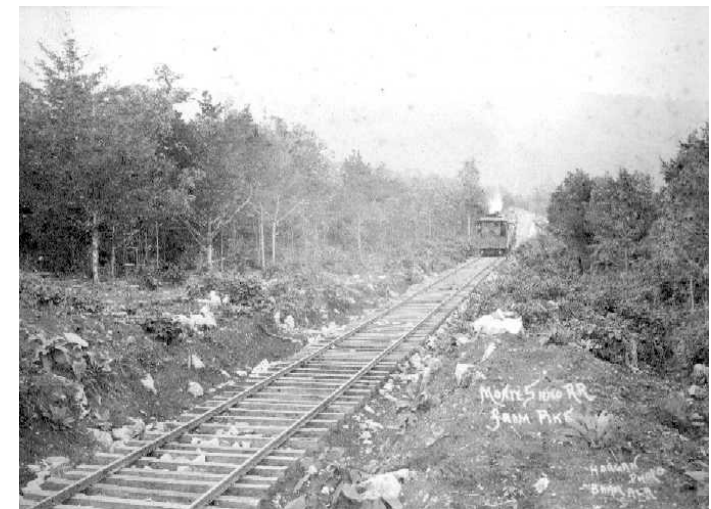
The words "Monte Sano" mean "Mountain of Health" in Italian. The summer months in the late 1800's saw yellow fever, cholera and diphtheria in epidemic proportions. Clean water and sanitary living conditions were found on the mountain and visitors' health did improve. However, because the causes of these diseases were not yet fully understood, many again would become ill after returning home.

The Hotel Monte Sano, a three-story 223 room wooden structure of Queen Anne architecture, was built in 1886 to serve as a health resort for hundreds of people from the South, particularly Memphis, Atlanta, and Nashville. Patrons traveled the eight miles from the Huntsville Depot to the hotel in four hours by horse and carriage. A person suffering from an illness was in for a very difficult journey.

To better serve guests, the Monte Sano Railway was created. Built between May and August 1888, five hundred workers were paid \$1.00 per day for twelve hours of work, six days a week. The train made three trips per day and took twenty minutes to travel the eight miles. Patrons paid 25 cents each way. The engine was disguised as a trolley car so that horses in downtown Huntsville wouldn't be frightened. Shortly after completion, the train's brake sand pipes choked - the wheels jumped the rails - and the train came to a quick stop. There was no damage to the passengers or the train, but the incident frightened potential riders. The railway was then used primarily for hauling supplies, but it went bankrupt in 1896. The tracks were salvaged and the trestles and bridges removed for firewood and building supplies.

The Hotel Monte Sano charged \$11.00 for a one week stay, including meals. Resort amusements included horseback riding, two bowling alleys, croquet, billiards, and lawn tennis. The grounds had beautiful gardens.

The popular resort's register showed guests from every state in the union and from several foreign countries. Visitors included philanthropist William H. Vanderbilt, Viscount William Waldorf Astor, composer Walter Damrosch, and railroad financier Jay Gould. However, once the cause and cure for yellow fever and cholera were discovered, a trip to the "Mountain of Health" was no longer necessary. Transportation problems and lack of patrons doomed the hotel and its last season was 1900.



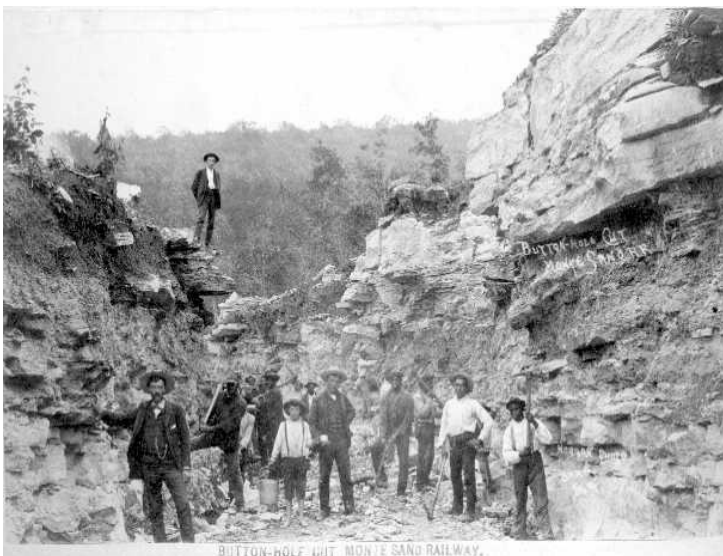
Land Trust of North Alabama protects scenic vistas, critical wetlands and water resources, animal habitat, and green corridors which define North Alabama and make it such a natural jewel.

Incorporated in 1987 as Alabama's first land trust, over 6,100 acres have been preserved in five counties. Land Trust volunteers maintain four nature preserves with 40+ miles of trails which are open to the public.

The Old Railroad Bed Trail is on property owned by the Land Trust and the City of Huntsville so that all may explore and enjoy North Alabama's natural beauty first hand.

1. Beginning of Old Railroad Bed Trail

A steam locomotive traveled the Monte Sano Railway from the Huntsville Depot to the Hotel Monte Sano from 1888 until 1896. Seven miles of the former railroad bed have been destroyed due to road construction and development. The remaining 1.5 miles is now the Old Railroad Bed Trail and was one of the first 500 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy projects.



The steel rails have long since been removed and the white oak cross ties salvaged by local residents. However, the old trestle and bridge supports are still intact and easily recognizable. The terrain is rocky and steep in some areas. *Use your imagination as the history of the railroad is retraced...*

2. First Trestle

This site is the first of six trestle foundations that helped the standard gauge 26-ton Baldwin steam locomotive and three coaches negotiate the steep slopes of Monte Sano Mountain. As the wheels and tracks were made of steel, the train ascended and descended the mountain using a series of tight curves in its course. The trestles and bridges made it possible to cross the creek beds and drainage gullies.

Notice that the stone foundations that were quarried and placed here have no mortar or cement. Although these materials were available, the costs were higher than the builders were willing to spend. Some stones were hand hewn and simply placed on top of one another as evenly as possible. It is remarkable that most of these stone foundation remain intact after enduring almost 120 years of weathering. These foundations provide the most visible record of the railroad.

3. Slope Excavation

In order to maintain a level surface, many areas of the mountainside were excavated and “mini-canyons” were formed for the train to pass. As the years have passed, erosion has filled in some of the passages and reduced the angle of the cuts. All that remains today is enough room for the trail. The original train could no longer travel down this passage.

4. First Bridge

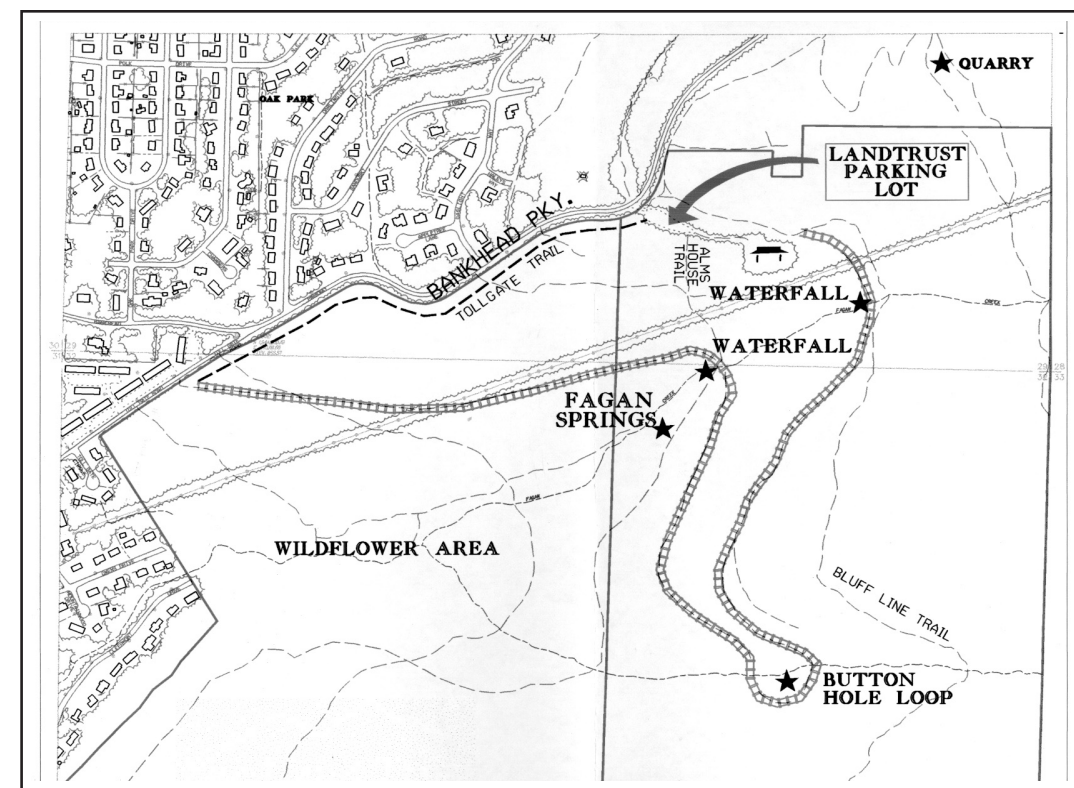
Bridges were constructed to span the drainage areas formed when rain water traveled down the mountainside. The five bridges that were built differ from the trestles in that no superstructure was required for the ridges. Tracks were simply laid down over the short gaps and provided a safe passageway.

5. Overturned Boulder-Slope Collapse

The berm of soil on which you are standing was not the original railroad bed. The huge rock seen below has rolled over into the old pathway. The incident happened in 1948 sixty years after the excavation.

A core sample removed from the tree shows that it began growing in 1932 and slowly continued to grow for an additional fourteen years on the upper edge of the boulder. The tree rings show a trauma occurred in 1948 and for five years almost no growth progressed. In 1953 the tree began a period of rapid growth as its root system recovered and the newly opened forest canopy allowed unrestricted sunlight to energize and fuel the tree.

Today, a slope ordinance exists in Huntsville that restricts building on steep slopes. This will prevent future development on these dangerous areas. This



valuable ecosystem is necessary to provide homes for animal and plant species that have been crowded out of their habitats due to urban expansion.

6. Mega Trestle

This is the site of the largest span on the railroad - 175 feet! It took workers almost two months to complete this section. Construction time on the entire railroad was four months.

7. Fagan Creek-Last Trestle

This site represents a crossroads of The Land Trust trail system. At this junction the Old Railroad Bed Trail continues to Tollgate Road and ends. The Alms House Trail to the left takes hikers to Fagan Springs and on to historic Three Caves Quarry. To the right, the Alms House Trail (1/4 mile/steep grade) takes hikers back to the Bankhead trailhead and parking lot.