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### **New Guidebook Shows Atlantans Where to Hike, Close to Home**

Spring is finally on the way to metro Atlanta, and if you love the great outdoors, you won't need to plan an entire weekend getaway to enjoy it. "Don't let the asphalt and skyscrapers of Atlanta fool you," says outdoor educator Jonah McDonald. "Hikers don't need to drive hours to the mountains. Chances are, you live mere minutes from wooded trails."

McDonald reveals these local getaways in his new guidebook, *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests: Intown and Out*. Listing 60 hikes within 30 miles of Georgia's Capitol dome, the new guide shows experienced and casual hikers alike how to get out on the trails without leaving the city. Of the 60 hikes, 20 are inside the perimeter and nearly half have appeared in no other guidebook. Hike routes range from less than a mile to 12 miles.

"My goal is to share opportunities for getting outside closer to home," says McDonald. "I want Atlantans to know about the amazing trails in and around our city. These hikes and greenspaces are local treasures for us to be proud of."

Besides essential information like maps, turn-to-turn hiking directions, and trailhead addresses with GPS coordinates, each route description includes data on champion and sentinel trees—important specimens noted for their size, age, or other salient characteristics—along the trail. Many also list birds commonly seen. Hike destinations and highlights include waterfalls, ruined bridges and historic mills, rocky outcrops that make good picnic spots, and unusual bamboo groves.

*Jonah McDonald* is the founder and principle guide of Sure Foot Adventures. His guidebook was inspired in part by his discovery of the many small nature preserves and neighborhood parks within the Atlanta perimeter while leading outdoor excursions for schools and families. An Appalachian Trail 2000-miler and former school teacher, he resides in Atlanta.

*Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests: Intown and Out* will be available beginning April 1 wherever good books are sold, and may also be ordered directly from the publisher at 828-488-6601 or online at [www.milestonepress.com](http://www.milestonepress.com).

April 1, 2014 □ Hiking GA □ Paperback Original  
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**Praise for Jonah McDonald's**

***Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests: Intown and Out***

*"At last, an urban hiking book for Atlanta! Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests is a 'must have' addition to your backpack, whether you live intown or outside the perimeter."*

--Robby Astrove, Park Ranger  
Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve

*"Thanks, Jonah, for showing us not just why we should celebrate our leafy creek walks, but how to do it as well. Some say Atlanta is only about asphalt. This guidebook will change their minds."*

--Sally Sears, Executive Director, The South Fork Conservancy

*"Most people assume that you have to get into a car and drive for hours to isolated areas in the North Georgia mountains or along the Atlantic coast to see "good" birds. It was a serendipitous moment when Barbara Sajor and I realized that Jonah was writing a book about hiking in natural areas in Atlanta, covering the same places where birders had already been seeing all sorts of interesting birds. What a great guide for a new way to explore Atlanta!"*

--Joy Carter, President, Atlanta Audubon Society

*"Jonah McDonald shows that Atlanta is not just the city of trees, but the city of trails, providing easy, fact-filled descriptions of dozens of hikes in the metro area. My family already has been setting aside one day each weekend to try out some of the great hikes in this book."*

--George Dusenbury, Commissioner  
City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation

*"Finally, a resource that pays tribute to Atlanta's rich and diverse habitats and park lands—bravo! Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests invites everyone to explore and learn about these relatively unknown, and many times underappreciated, outdoor sanctuaries."*

--Nikki Belmonte, Executive Director  
Atlanta Audubon Society



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## **A Conversation with Jonah McDonald**

*Author of Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests: Intown and Out*

**You hiked the entire Appalachian Trail in 2002. How did you become an urban hiker?**

After completing the AT, I knew I wanted to continue to make hiking a major part of my life. But living in Atlanta, my only model for hiking was driving hours out of town to get back to the Appalachians. At the same time, I started leading outdoor education programs, hikes, and camping trips for school groups. Some of these schools didn't have the time or money to send their students to the mountains, so I had to find forests in the city. I discovered so many amazing greenspaces hidden around Atlanta that I no longer yearned for the mountains. Now I hike beautiful trails in urban forests several times a week without having to spend more than a few minutes en route.

**You list over 150 "sentinel" and "champion" trees in your new book. What exactly are these trees, and why are they important?**

Atlanta is a city of trees, but very few of us stop to truly admire the beauty of the arboreal giants standing around us. The nonprofit organization Trees Atlanta recognizes trees that are the largest of their species within the perimeter and calls them champions. I came up with the term sentinel tree to recognize other particularly large, ancient, or otherwise remarkable trees – some of Atlanta's trees are over 200 years old. By listing sentinel and champion trees on each hike, I hope to encourage my fellow hikers to take special notice of the trees that make up the backbone of our city's ecosystem and provide a living link to the past. Including these trees in the guidebook also adds a treasure hunt component to each hike: Can you find each sentinel or champion tree along the trail?

**The Atlanta Audubon Society contributed lists of birds often seen in some of the greenspaces your book explores. Are you a birder yourself?**

Though I love hearing bird calls as I walk through an urban forest, I am decidedly bad at identifying birds by sight or sound. That's why I asked the Atlanta Audubon Society to help me include birds in this guidebook. Hikers can find birds in Atlanta's forests year-round, and we are a major stop on many species' migration routes. My love for this city grows every time I encounter a bird that shares my environment, be it a majestic red-shouldered hawk, an elusive screech owl, or just an unidentifiable "little brown bird." Thanks to the Atlanta Audubon Society, our birds have advocates for healthy habitat. I hope people who use my guidebook will join in his advocacy for birds, trees, and trails.

**Yours isn't the only guidebook with "hike" and "Atlanta" in the title. How is it different from the others?**

Not only is *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests* the first guidebook dedicated entirely to hikes in intown and close-in neighborhoods, nearly half of its 60 hikes appear in no other guidebook. That means this book gets the word out about intown greenspaces that, until now, have been explored only by in-the-know neighbors and hiking enthusiasts. I'm proud that 20 of the 60 routes are inside the perimeter and many more are just outside the I-285 loop. Other guidebooks include only urban sidewalk routes within I-285, while this one focuses on trails in the forest. Also, with this book in hand, you can experience full days of hiking without spending half a day in the car.

**When researching a hiking guidebook, how does an author decide which trails to include? What were your criteria?**

From the beginning I knew I wanted to focus on hikes close to downtown Atlanta, so I drew a 30-mile radius from the Capitol dome and began highlighting greenspaces that might provide a good hiking experience. The second criterion was equally important: "Do these forest trails help you forget you are in a city?" I try not to use the term "urban hiking" to describe this book. The phrase may apply in the literal sense, but it brings to mind crowds of people, skyscrapers, and asphalt. Though some trails in this book draw thousands of hikers (the Stone Mountain Walk-Up Trail, for example), skyscrapers are visible from some (such as Piedmont Park), and some trails are even paved (like McDaniel Farm), every hike route is within a forest or other natural area, and most of them allow hikers to totally immerse themselves in the natural world and forget they are in one of the largest cities in the United States.

**As you were doing your research, did you run into any surprises?**

I had no idea how underutilized most of our city's greenspaces are. Though you will pass hundreds of hikers at Cochran Shoals and Sweetwater Creek (and thousands more on Kennesaw Mountain's Summit Trail and Stone Mountain's Walk-Up Trail), it's unusual to see more than one or two hikers at Cascade Springs Nature Preserve, the largest greenspace in the City of Atlanta. Even within the popular Stone Mountain Park, very few people hike the Cherokee Trail and almost no one visits the Songbird Trails. Most Atlantans know the most famous hiking venues in town, but few explore the dozens of other greenspaces that hold equal beauty. My hope is that *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests* will change this.

**What hike would you recommend for someone just starting out hiking in Atlanta, and why?**

My wife laughed at me a lot while I was working on this book because every time I returned home from scouting a hike, I would say, "That is definitely my favorite hike in Atlanta!" So it's like asking me to choose my favorite kind of ice cream—if you push me to recommend just one, I think I can settle on three.

First is the **East Palisades** unit of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area—it's just inside the perimeter, but feels like the Appalachian Mountains. You'll walk along the riverbank, visit two overlooks, meander through a laurel-filled hollow, and pass through an amazing bamboo grove.

Second is the **Morningside Nature Preserve**, one of the largest nature preserves in the City of Atlanta. This hike leads through the lowlands of the South Fork of Peachtree Creek and rolling piedmont hills covered with wildflowers. Despite its proximity to bustling Atlanta streets, the trails feel miles away.

Third would be Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve's **Mountaintop Trail**. Similar to the famous Stone Mountain Walk-Up Trail, Mountaintop Trail provides an incredibly scenic and much more secluded hike. From the top of Arabia Mountain, you can barely tell you're in the city.



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## Facts about Jonah McDonald's

### ***Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests: Intown and Out***

- Includes 60 hikes at more than 45 hiking destinations, all within 30 miles of downtown
- Of the 60 hikes in the book, 27 appear for the first time in any guide
- Of the 60 hikes, 20 are within the perimeter and many are just outside I-285
- Route lengths range from less than a mile to 12 miles
- All hike descriptions list public transportation access information
- Lists descriptions and GPS coordinates for more than 150 sentinel trees, including city and state champion trees
- Hikes from *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests* are included in Milestone Press's new mobile hiking app, *Great Hikes of the Southern Appalachians*.

## 45 Metro Atlanta Hiking Destinations

- Atlanta Memorial Park
- Autrey Mill Nature Preserve & Heritage Center
- Big Trees Forest Preserve
- Blue Heron Nature Preserve
- Boundary Waters Park
- Cascade Springs Nature Preserve
- Clinton Nature Preserve
- Chattahoochee River NRA (10 hikes)
- Cochran Mill Park
- Cochran Mill Nature Center
- Constitution Lakes Park
- Clyde Shepherd Nature Preserve
- Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve (5 hikes)
- Dunwoody Nature Center
- Elwyn John Wildlife Sanctuary
- Frazer Forest & Deep Dene Park
- Glenlake Park & Decatur Cemetery
- Hahn Woods & Lullwater Park
- Henderson Park
- Herbert Taylor Park
- Heritage Park
- Kennesaw Mountain Battlefield Park (3 hikes)
- Line Creek Nature Area
- Leita Thompson Memorial Park
- McDaniel Farm Park
- Melvin L. Newman Wetlands Center
- Mercer University Nature Trail
- Morningside Nature Preserve
- Murphey Candler Park
- Olde Rope Mill Park
- Outdoor Activity Center
- Panola Mountain State Park
- Piedmont Park
- Reynolds Nature Preserve
- Simpsonwood Conference & Retreat Center
- South Peachtree Creek Trail
- Stone Mountain Park (3 hikes)
- Sweetwater Creek State Park (2 hikes)
- The Beltline (2 hikes)
- W.D. Thompson Park
- Yellow River Park (2 hikes)



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## **About the Author**

*Jonah McDonald* is the founder of Sure Foot Adventures, an outdoor guide service providing hiking, camping, backpacking, and outdoor education programs throughout the Southeast. As an educator and naturalist, he has designed and taught wilderness and outdoor programs for several Atlanta-area independent schools. McDonald thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2002. *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests* was inspired by his many days spent exploring the greenspaces of metro Atlanta.

As a professional storyteller, McDonald performs for groups of all ages. He conducts bicycle tours of the Battle of Atlanta for Bicycle Tours of Atlanta and the city's B\*ATL Festival. He has served on the board of the Friends School of Atlanta, the Southern Order of Storytellers, and the American Friends Service Committee. Beyond his passion for hiking, McDonald raises chickens in his backyard, enjoys basketball and rock climbing, throws boomerangs, and is the proud hiking companion of a Catahoula leopard dog named Lio. He lives in Atlanta with his wife, Dana Goldman. *Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests* is his first guidebook.

**For further information or to arrange an interview with Jonah McDonald,  
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