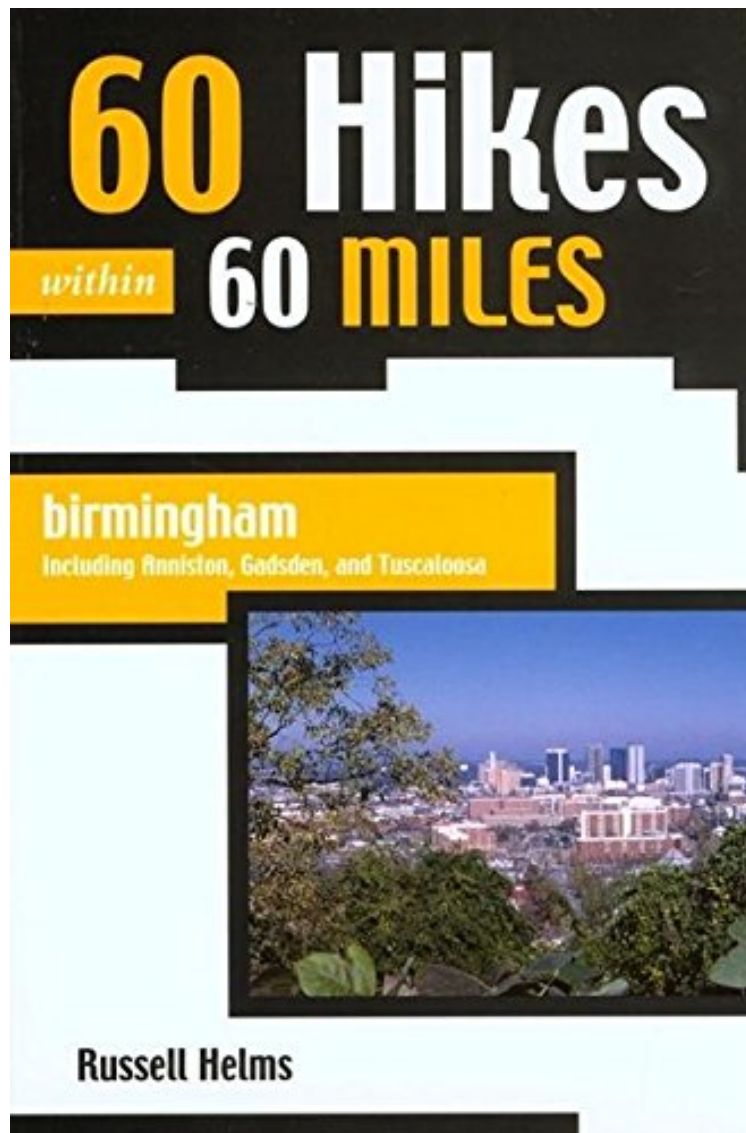


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## 60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Birmingham: Including Anniston, Gadsden, and Tuscaloosa

*Russell Helms*

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**Russell Helms : 60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Birmingham: Including Anniston, Gadsden, and Tuscaloosa** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised 60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Birmingham: Including Anniston, Gadsden, and Tuscaloosa:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Fine book, but would have been better to only have the dozen good hikes to get you outside and exploring Birmingham. By C. Robinson I have spent the past two years carrying Russell Helms' book through the mountains, trails, city streets, and abandoned furnaces of Alabama. Here are my comments. First, the good. I have learned a great deal more about the state of Alabama in the past two years than I knew before. I have hiked and camped in places that I never knew existed, had wonderful evenings with friends, and seen some beautiful country. Further, after I started with Helms, I then branched out and saw more of Alabama outside of his 60 miles (e.g., Little River Canyon). At the end of this, I will try to indicate some of the hikes that are actually worth your time. While I have benefited greatly from using Helms' books, there are many downsides and reasons that one might want to pick a different book, or use Helms' book in conjunction with another book. First, Helms is liberal with the definition of '60 mile' and of 'hike.' I will trust Helms that these hikes are all within 60 miles of Birmingham "as the crow flies" but not 60 "drive miles." So, if you are planning a quick trip, you might be in for a surprise. Further, some of these are not what you would call hikes. A stroll through Sloss Furnace, a walk down a few city blocks ("Civil Rights Trail"), a parking lot beside a lake ("Lakeside Park Loop"), the short deck that leads out to an overlook near Mt. Cheaha ("Bald Rock Boardwalk"), a short stroll through a cemetery ("Oak Hill Cemetery Walk"), a walk through the paved miniature re-creation of Jerusalem ("Ava Maria Grotto trail") are not hikes. While they might be interesting for other reasons, they don't belong in a book on hikes. Second, Helms' regularly gives horrible directions to the hike and during the hike. I have gotten lost many times trying to follow his directions. He also seems to regularly confuse the letters Y and T, and left and right (e.g., on the horrible "Guntersville Tom Beville/ Cave trail," and the mediocre "Oak Mt Lake Tranquility loop"). While these can be dangerous, in that a hike may take longer than you planned for (especially on the "Pinhoti Trail - Adams Gap to Disaster" which is longer, ill marked, and far more boring than Helms lets on), they have often added a much needed break while me and my hiking companions struggle to discover just what Russell meant. On a related note, you might want to consider your vehicle in getting to some of these hikes, as they are often off-road, over loose gravel. If you don't mind cussing a lot, then these issues might not be a problem for you. Third, after completing 50 of these hikes, I discovered that the majority of them are absolute rubbish, filler to finish out the theme of the book, and boring walks through boring forests to nothing ("Jefferson State Combo," "Maplebridge-Horseshoe," "Cahaba River WMA Hike," "Cahaba Lily Park Nature Trail," both Sipseys, I'm talking about you). The worst part of the "Sipsey River Trail," the longest hike in the book, was that Helms takes you out and back to a single trail marker, and ignores the side trail that would have taken you to the largest tree in Alabama. I'll save you time on that trail: the only interesting sites are within the first mile, and should you decide to go further, see the largest tree. My companions and I didn't see it, and we have regretted it ever since, but we are not motivated to endure the boredom again. I am sure that his description of the other Sipsey trail is wrong ("Flint Creek White Loop"), as it is longer and much more suited to dirt biking or something and not hiking. It is beyond boring, with nothing to see, with trees on either side closing you in the entire way. Finally, to add more filler, he also splits up larger hikes and presents short side trails as if they were complete trails (e.g., "Ruffner Hollow Tree Trail," "Oak Mountain: Tree Top"). Many times, my friends and I have wondered how he picked the trails he did (e.g., there are more interesting trails at Lake Guntersville than those Helms mentions). Part of this problem is not Helms', as there are maybe a dozen good hikes in the Birmingham area. For those interested, I'll list what I think are the best ones: "Moss Rock", "Tannehill Ironworks trail", several trails at Ruffner (e.g., "Quarry trail") and Oak Mountain (e.g., "Peavine Falls"), "Boulder Canyon Loop," "Hurricane Creek Park Loop," "Sumatanga Red Trail," and that's it. There are many others that were not hikes per se, but were interesting and beautiful places that I am glad Helms mentioned (e.g., "Aldridge Gardens Trail," "Noccalula"). Finally, there are those that are just close and one can get a quick taste of nature while still being close to the city (e.g., "Jemison Park Nature trail," "Vulcan Trail," "Munny Sokol Park Loop," and "Spain Park"). In the end, I would say that this is a good book to start with and use as a reference, but one has to have a great willingness to deal with ambiguity, and one should expect that getting to and completing a hike will take longer than indicated. One should not slavishly follow Helms' directions or choices. As for me, I did discover a new love of the wilderness that did not exist before, and for that I am thankful. In that vein, if you start with the good hikes I've mentioned, you might also somewhat forgive Helms for needing to pad out the book with filler hikes. \*\*Added 24 September 2011: Since I wrote this review, I have finished all the hikes in Helms' book and have been working through another hiking book. This has allowed me to put Helms' book in a different perspective. First, while my criticisms remain valid, Helms' directions are actually better than those in other hiking books. So, in that context, his book is actually somewhat better than some other hiking books. You will still have to pay attention to where you are going, but Helms is better by contrast, and so for that reason I have added a star to his review. Second, there are other good hikes in the Birmingham area other than those I mentioned. In particular, Cheaha has several great hikes, including the Nubbin Creek Loop, the Blue Mountain Jaunt, and the Cave Creek Loop. Be warned, the Nubbin Creek loop is at least two miles longer than Helms lists, and the Cave Creek Loop is very hard on the feet. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Janice Porter Very informative and useful. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Mar Good book

Including hikes near Anniston, Gadsden, Cullman, and Tuscaloosa, 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham reaches out to provide the best day hikes within an hour's drive of the Magic City. From mine-riddled Ruffner Mountain in the Eastwood/Irondale area to the blast furnaces of Tannehill State Park, area hiking paths cross hidden ore shafts, pass over vast deposits of coal, and circle immense limestone quarries. In fact, hiking in Birmingham almost always leads back to three things: iron, coal, and limestone—the history of the Birmingham area and all facets of its growth are welded to its vast mineral wealth. Those hikes, though, that have a minimal connection to iron and steel, such as the wild trails of Talladega National Forest, stake their reputation on a fourth natural resource: rugged physical beauty.

From the Back Cover No more excuses like "there's nowhere to go around here," "the woods are too far from the city," or "I don't have time to wander the trails." With 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham as your guide, you have dozens of places to hike to your heart's content, and most within an hour's drive or less. 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham blows the lid off the myth that you can't have a great hike close to home. The Birmingham area may be ever-expanding, but there are still plenty of super hiking options: short hikes, long hikes, hikes for kids, urban hikes, rural hikes, wildlife hikes, historic hikes, and many others. Inside you will find: trail descriptions that allow you to assess each trail before you hike it; GPS-based trail maps that provide you with accurate trail information; trail profiles that help you visualize altitude gain and loss; directions that lead you to the trailheads. Whether you live in Birmingham, Anniston, Gadsden, or Tuscaloosa, 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham provides the information necessary for you to choose the perfect day hike, as well as maps, directions, trail lengths, hiking times, highlights, and a wealth of detail about the trail itself. So lace up those boots, sling that daypack, and hit the trail!