

**01/31/10: Sipsey Day Hike,  
Bankhead National Forest, AL**

Sometimes the trip you mean to take your time on ends up being the one that tests your patience a little bit. After 8 miles in 4 hours (I had intended half this distance), I was a bit of a grump, and still didn't find what I was looking for.

The day started at the Thompson Creek Trailhead, which was muddy, and the creek pretty high itself. I made my way down to the White Oak Hollow creek crossing, a two step leap before wandering off down a section of trail I hadn't been on in two years, and what surprises it held! I passed several arborglyphs I'd never seen before, and paid special attention to the bluff line, in hunt of a place called the Hook Rockhouse Shelter, which I did end up finding, with a strange inscription on a stone that I could best interpret as "llll LOW MATH". Who knows what that meant? I wandered around the bluff line here, spotting more arborglyphs while dodging icicles that came crashing down from above. The sound reminded me more of the roar of a jet engine.

Not long after I arrived at Auburn Falls, a beautiful cascading type waterfall that was completely dry the last time I saw it. Continuing on, I came to the very obvious Ship Rock and Eye of the Needle rock formations. You could hear the roar of the Sipsey Rapids from the other side of this narrow and unique slice of rock. Passing through the eye, I navigated the boulder field, spotting a tree with fading initials and a date of 1922 nearby. I sat above the rapids and ate a leisurely lunch.

From here, it was a short walk down the Sipsey River Trail to the old TR 205, a roadbed that led to the top of the ridge and then wound back and forth for a ways before I finally gave up and attempted to hike as the crow flies through the almost meadow-like land. I ended up along a small stream, and following it down, it put above the very tall 60-80ft seasonal waterfall that one sees from a distance if you've come over from White Oak Hollow. After enjoying the beautiful view from above, I quickly hopped the final two hills and made my way up to the drop off in a drainage further up West Bee Branch than usual, in search of an unusual rock formation and a double mortar, one of three known to exist in the entire national forest. A 15-20ft waterfall, a beautiful shimmering gem hidden in this not often visited stretch of the Sipsey Wilderness, headed up the small canyon.

I took to the left of the falls, and passing boulders as tall as a two story house finally came to the feature I was searching for: two boulders leaning against one another, providing a shelter beneath. I took note of a possible petroglyph here, but I can't be certain that's what it was. I then headed back along the canyon searching for that elusive mortar that was rumored to be here, but never found it. Has time covered it up with leaves and fallen trees so much it's lost forever now? Or did looters get their hands on it like what's befallen most of the shelters around here? I guess I'll never know.