

**05/14/10: Rainbow Mountain Preserve,
Madison, AL**

Two robins, two squirrels, a chipmunk and a possible skink; that's the total wildlife numbers from the outing. This was round two at Rainbow Mountain for myself and a friend who has long deemed my strolls in the park "Hikes of Doom". Yes, James went for a hike; I have proof! Photos! That aside, we saw more wildlife up here than I usually see. It helps that rain was forecasted and the place was completely deserted. We hiked the reverse of what I generally do: Take the Rainbow Mountain Loop down to the Spring Trail, Spring Trail up to the intersection of the Wild Trail, and then the Wild Trail back to the Rainbow Mountain Loop. You end up with a hike that's approximately the same distance as taking just the Loop trail itself, 1.5-2 miles, which we did last week on a rare day where I didn't take photos, let alone bring a camera.

There were a number of new wildflowers blooming, including one red with a star yellow center, one of my favorites of this area. We passed Balance Rock, and chose to walk the middle trail of three that parallel each other. The middle trail offers a better view of the unique rock features of the Mountain, though you miss the rock overhangs and pseudo caves on the lower trail that's been misused and abused by idiots with paint cans. The trail turns from mostly dirt to an adventure in rock hopping and injury inducing falls if you're not careful. The trail then turns left, going downhill, a little steep at times.

However, if your knees ail you, it is better to go down this section than up it. It might be recommended, though, to not take the Spring Trail back up if that's the problem and stay straight and deal with the occasional inclines of the Loop trail on the other side of the intersection with the Spring Trail. We opted this week, though, for shorter distance since light was fading and headed up the Spring Trail, passing the double "waterfall" that was barely trickling, fed by multiple springs that are having a hard time running due to some lack of rain. I'd forgotten just how steep the Spring Trail was going up, and multiple stops were needed on both accounts, though I did find some photo attractive purple wildflowers to photograph while waiting on my leg muscle to quit aching, though it never did. Reaching the top of the Spring Trail, we found the main spring completely dried up.

Needing a little break from the incline, we opted to travel down the Wild Trail, which features two caves, one sizable and something I'd like to explore, but you'd need a bit of rope to get down into the first section, about a 10ft drop with little handholds. More of those pretty star wildflowers were found here, right before the really short, but really uphill last leg of the Wild Trail back to the ridge and the Loop Trail. Heading out, I led us over the top tier of the three trails, which, while lacking in interesting rock features, offers great views (mostly in winter) southward.