

BREAKING OUT

Winter is right time for urban hikes

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With days still short, and weather unpredictable this time of year, what's a hiker to do?

Sure, Paris Mountain State Park is nearby for quick hikes, but its extensive trail system can leave a hiker stranded miles from shelter if darkness falls quickly as it does in late afternoon in the winter or if a storm rolls in.

Winter truly is the season for hikes in more urban locales.

Surprisingly — for some — the city of Greenville has numerous options for urban hiking. With a combination of natural surface and paved trails available, local parks offer opportunities for a short jaunt or more prolonged outings.

Cleveland Park is central for urban hiking. With plenty of parking and bathrooms, it offers four natural surface trails as well as a loop system of paved trails. The Swamp Rabbit Trail also bisects the trail, offering lengthy options south and north.

A total of four natural surface trails, two of them developed as Eagle Scout projects, dot the park's 122 acres. While the 2.75 miles of trails do not connect, a hiker can easily access them all via paved trails and put together a hike of more than 4 miles.

Cleveland Park is also easily connected to Reedy Falls Park by the Swamp Rabbit Trail.



The Swamp Rabbit Trail bisects Cleveland Park near downtown Greenville, offering views of the Reedy River and access to other trails in the park.

Using the Swamp Rabbit, hikers can easily link together lengthy sojourns between the parks and into downtown for food or fluid and then return to their starting point.

Other area parks with hiking options include McPherson Park, located almost literally in the shadows of downtown's skyscrapers and the Bi-Lo Center. This is a smallish park, just 12.5 acres, but it's packed with recreational options including a ¼-mile loop paved trail that encircles the park.

Timmons Park, located off East North Street at 121 Oxford St., covers 26 acres and includes a mountain bike trail and disc golf course that combined easily serve as a natural-surface hiking trail.

Lake Conestee Nature Park isn't exactly urban, but it's not in

the mountains either. Since you can often hear traffic from many locations in the 400-acre park, it certainly seems a bit urban. But once you delve deep into the trail system, you'll find it's more of an urban oasis.

The park is 6 miles south of downtown Greenville, but located off busy Mauldin Road, it's closer to being in the epicenter of Greenville County. The park features about 3 miles of natural surface trails and 2 miles of paved trails, along with nearly a half-mile of boardwalks.

Renowned as a birding hotspot, this location is also optimal for seeing plenty of other wildlife, such as rabbits, squirrels, foxes, deer, raccoons, beavers, river otters and more. About 3 miles of the Reedy River bisect the park, which adds to its allure.



The Fernwood Nature Trail offers a half-mile natural-surface journey through thick woods at the edge of Cleveland Park. PHOTOS BY MIKE FOLEY/STAFF



The Troop 19 Trail is the longest natural-surface trail in Cleveland Park at about 1¼ miles. It was created by a Boy Scout and his fellow troop members and meanders above a hillside near The Zoo.