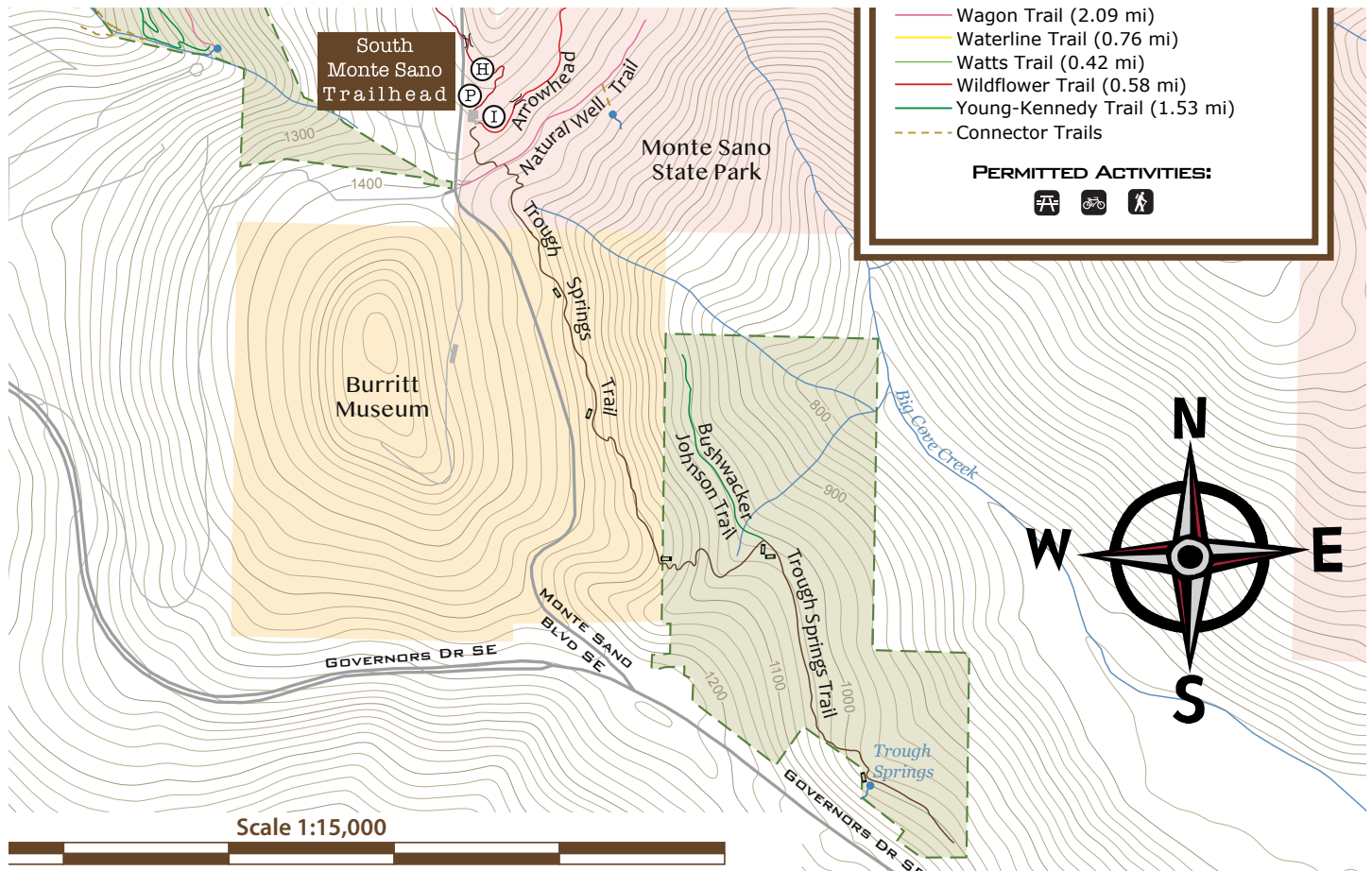


TROUGH SPRING TRAIL TOUR

Monte Sano Nature Preserve



TOUR ROUTE

South Monte Sano Trailhead » Trough Spring Trail » Back to South Monte Sano Trailhead
(approximately 2.68 miles)

Begin from South Monte Sano Trailhead (1970 Monte Sano Blvd SE, Huntsville, AL 35801). Follow Trough Spring Trail. This trail meanders south beginning on Monte Sano State Park property, cutting through a portion of land managed by Burritt Museum and ends just beyond the location of the actual spring on Land Trust's Monte Sano Nature Preserve. Once you reach the end of the trail, turn around and head back the way you came.

Always take a trail map!

Monte Sano Nature Preserve trail map available at landtrustal.org/monte-sano-preserve

Trail Tour provided by
David Young, Land Trust Hike Leader



STORIES OF TROUGH SPRING

The Trough Spring hike is a visit to an important historic location in Madison County. It is the site of surrender for Lt. Col. 'Bushwhacker' Johnston and approximately 135 to 150 Confederate soldiers, a few months after the end of the Civil War.

Milus Edding Johnston was born in 1823 near Lebanon, TN. He became a Methodist minister and worked church circuits in North Alabama from Fayetteville, TN. His early years during the Civil Wars found him working from Fayetteville to Madison and Jackson Counties in Alabama, including Larkinsville, in Jackson County. Working these circuits, Johnston learned the lay-of-the-land in this area and also got to know many of the citizens.

Johnston was arrested in 1862 in Fayetteville by Union occupation soldiers under General Mitchell. Mitchell controlled (as well as he could) lands North of the Tennessee River from Bridgeport to Decatur and North to Fayetteville. Mitchell proclaimed marshal law and began to arrest 'suspect' citizens. Even the peaceful minister was suspect and was arrested. He escaped from custody, realized that his preaching would be limited and decided to sit out the war working his father-in-law's farm near Vienna (now New Hope, in Madison Co.).

During this time, Lemuel Mead, a lawyer from Paint Rock, had returned with his Army mustered from North Alabama, and recruited more men from inside Union held North Alabama. However, the Union soldiers did not recognize these men as regular Confederate soldiers and labeled them 'Bushwhackers'. A 'Bushwhacker' was considered to be a non-regular soldier, who fought in unconventional ways. The Confederates generally stayed south of the Tennessee River, but crossed for supply runs, raids and skirmishes with small groups of the Union Army. Attacks on the Union Armies were met by Union reprisals against unarmed residents of North Alabama. The Union would raid homes for provisions, burn homes, barns, and out buildings, and take livestock, including horses, cows, pigs, chickens, etc.

Late in 1863, in Oct or Nov, Union troops burned Bushwhacker Johnston's father-in-law's house. The family moved into the out buildings. A few weeks later, the Union troops returned, burned the remaining buildings as winter approached. The Union soldiers returned a third time to capture Bushwhacker himself. You see, he had in-laws that were in the Confederate army, and that made him a criminal (so watch out for those in-laws!). They chased him into the forest, intending to arrest him, but Bushwhacker escaped.

Bushwhacker had enough of this inhuman 'justice' and traveled across the Tennessee River to join the Confederate army. He was sworn into Confederate service in January 1864. He quickly rose to the rank of Major. He wrote his memoirs in his 80's. He was promoted to Lt. Col. March 27 1865, but never officially received his commission. When he surrendered at Trough Springs May 11, 1865, he stated his rank as Major. His surrender marked the end of the Civil War in North Alabama.

Being marked as Bushwhacker might not be entirely inaccurate, however. Johnston's methods of warfare and evasion were not considered orthodox for the time.

Methods of Attack:

Bushwhacker Johnston knew the Madison County area very well, as did his men. They were able to move about the region, using this knowledge, to evade Union troops, and attack supply trains, convoys and even engaged an armored boat attack.

One of Bushwhacker's favorite methods of Union engagement was, regardless of the number of his men, to split his men into three groups. A location of attack was planned. Due to the mountainous/hilly nature of the local terrain, Bushwhacker often chose a site near a bluff or steep area on the most frequently traveled roads. This would provide a limited response from the enemy. Bushwhacker would position one set of men above the attack site, one in front, and one behind. Being a minister, he required that his men give a chance for surrender. The front group would confront the Union troops and request that they surrender immediately. Normally this did not occur. When the Union troops attacked, they would be surrounded from the front, back and side, with the only potential escape down a steep hill or bluff.

Methods of Movement:

1) Crossing the Tennessee River: Using their knowledge of the area, Union garrison and outpost locations, the men could cross from the south side of the Tennessee River to Madison County almost at will. They generally used canoes to make night crossings of the river, although the river had not been dammed at that time making a narrower crossing than it would be today.

2) Traveling by horse: Bushwhacker and his men would split, and ride in different directions, sometimes even riding backwards, to evade pursuit. Then, they would meet again at a pre-determined location.

Surrender:

Bushwhacker and his men's surrender was planned much like a method of attack, which is why he accepted Trough Spring as the location for surrender. Trough Springs, at the time, but not now, was a watering hole for animals and people as they traveled from Big Cove to Huntsville. The site was covered by a landslide which was a result of construction of US Highway 431 above the site. The springs were a 'well-known location' for people who traveled this route. There was a bluff above the base of the spring. And a steep drop downhill from the road. When the surrender agreement was reached, only then did all the men emerge from their typical three position attack stance.

The surrender agreement stated that the men would keep their horses so they could work their crops, but surrender their guns. Bushwhacker knew a surrender of arms would be required. But he and his men had captured many Union arms during their raids and hid the best of these in many of the local caves. They brought with them the poorest quality arms they had for the surrender.

Very soon after the surrender was signed, and before the Union officials could begin to issue papers of parole, rain began to fall. The Union troops requested that the Confederates surrender their arms and spend the night in Huntsville, where the paroles would be signed in the morning. The Confederates refused to give up their arms without the parole papers. The troops eventually all went to Huntsville to be paroled in the morning. As the Confederate troops arrived in Huntsville, the citizens commented that it was amazing that this group of troops with such poor and deteriorating arms could have fought so well against the well-armed Union troops.

Bushwhacker wrote a series of articles for Guntersville Democrat in the 1890's that were published in weekly installments between April and December, 1902. These stories were eventually compiled into a book called "The Sword of Bushwhacker Johnston. Milus Edding Johnston died Oct 8th, 1915 at the age of 92 years old.