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History and Facts

Basic Facts about the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area

- Location: DeKalb, Henry and Rockdale Counties; includes the city of Lithonia and portions of Stonecrest
- Size: Approximately 40,000 acres (64 square miles)
 - Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve: 2,500+ acres
 - Panola Mountain State Park: 1,635 acres
 - Monastery of the Holy Spirit: 2,275+ acres
 - The Monastery of the Holy Spirit is the largest privately-owned protected greenspace in metro-Atlanta
 - Total of approximately 7,000 acres of protected greenspace within the AMNHA
- Trails:
 - 30+ miles of paved walking/biking trail (the Arabia Mountain PATH, or “AMP”)
 - 6.5 miles of soft trails at Panola Mountain State Park
 - 10 miles (approx.) of soft trails at Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve
- 2 main monadnocks (Arabia and Panola)
 - Many other, much smaller, granite outcrops are scattered throughout the area
- 2 rivers (South River and Yellow River)
- Significant cultural/historical assets:
 - Flat Rock: One of the oldest African-American settlements in Georgia, surviving slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction and suburban development. Begin your exploration of Flat Rock at the Flat Rock Archives.
 - Vaughters’ Farm: The last remaining dairy farm landscape in a county – DeKalb – that once was the largest dairy producer in the state of Georgia. Managed as part of Panola Mountain State Park.
 - Lyon Farm: One of the oldest continuously occupied homesteads in the National Heritage Area, built circa 1823 and family occupied until 2003.
 - The Parker House: The oldest home in Rockdale County, built circa 1822. Managed as part of Panola Mountain State Park.
 - Historic Klondike: placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 as an example of a rural Georgia crossroads community.
 - Historic Lithonia: noted for its granite buildings and at one point home to DeKalb’s first library. Today, the downtown is the home of a variety of shops and restaurants.
 - Monastery of the Holy Spirit: an expansive conservation area, 40 Cistercian monks who live in a community grounded in conservation and contemplation. The Abbey Church, built of poured concrete, has been called “Georgia’s Most Remarkable Concrete Building.”

History of the Arabia Mountain NHA



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- Evidence of human settlement dating back as far as 10,000 years
 - Native American artifacts have been found throughout the National Heritage Area
- The South River and Yellow River were used as trade and travel routes by pre-Columbian people
- Soapstone artifacts along the South River date to the Archaic Period (8,000 BCE-1000 BCE), indicating a history of quarrying and trading; settlements were built nearby the waterways, especially in the Woodland (200 BCE-900 CE) and Missippian (900 CE-1700 CE) periods
- The area that now forms the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area was, at the time of early United States expansions into the region, mostly territory belonging to the Muscogee (Creek) nation, with some land held within the Cherokee nation
- In 1821, the Muscogee (Creek) nation ceded a large tract of land to the state of Georgia that encompassed present-day DeKalb, Henry and Rockdale counties; the state sold off the formerly Creek land to settlers via land lottery
- The first European-American community in the National Heritage Area was Rock Chapel at Rock Mountain, founded in 1820 by James Diamond, the first surveyor for DeKalb County
- Land lots were distributed to qualified settlers; the Lyon Homestead was built during this time (1830's-1840's) and is today one of the oldest homesteads in DeKalb County
 - The Lyon Farm is a remnant of the agricultural community of Flat Rock
 - Flat Rock is also one of the oldest African-American communities in Georgia; began as a pre-Civil War agricultural community, with both free and enslaved people, a group of freedmen remained in Flat Rock following emancipation. Today, their descendants operate the Flat Rock Archives, part of the AMNHA
- The city of Lithonia was chartered in 1856, named after "Lithos" - the Greek word for "stone"
- Throughout the 20th century, the area that is now the AMNHA was filled with a thriving rural economy, with agriculture and quarry work being the two main industries
 - Until the 1900's, cotton was the main agricultural product in the region; in the 1900's that transitioned to predominately dairy farms (Vaughters' Farm now preserves the dairy farm landscape in the county)
- In the 20th century, the Stone Mountain-Lithonia-Conyers area contained the most productive granite industry in Georgia
 - Lithonia granite was found to be especially usable and was shipped throughout the country, ultimately helping build structures such as the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, NY, among others
 - The quarry business attracted immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Scandinavia and Italy as well as African-Americans who migrated to Lithonia after the Civil War
 - The Davidson family was prominent in the quarrying business; they donated their land to DeKalb County to create the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve
 - The quarry business took a hit during the Great Depression; some quarries survived by shifting their production to poultry grit and road construction materials
 - Poultry grit was especially lucrative and made the Davidson family wealthy
- Following the Great Depression, the growth of Atlanta benefitted the economy of the Lithonia area



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- Lithonia’s African-American community was resilient in the face of marginalization and segregation, and beginning in the 1940’s flourished
 - The Lithonia Speedway and the Lithonia Country Club were both popular gathering places for African-Americans and featured musical acts such as B. B. King and James Brown
 - Local activists also began to push back against segregation and discrimination; one prominent example is Lucious Sanders, an African-American veteran who formed the Lithonia Civic League to mobilize community members
- As the 20th century progressed, the area transformed from being largely rural to increasingly suburban, a change that accompanied a surge in population
- In 1944, a group of Cistercian monks founded the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in rural Conyers
- In 1969, Panola Mountain State Park became the state of Georgia’s first Conservation Park
- In 1972, the Davidson family gifted Arabia Mountain to DeKalb County, thus creating the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve
- In 1980, Panola Mountain was designated as a National Natural Landmark by the US Department of the Interior
- In 2004, the Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort (AWARE) opened
- In 2006, the Flat Rock Archives was formed to preserve the history of Flat Rock, one of the oldest African-American communities in Georgia
- In 2006, the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area was formally established by congress, with the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance named as the nonprofit entity involved in coordinating and overseeing the activities of the National Heritage Area
- In 2017, the City of Stonecrest was incorporated
- Today, the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area is a cultural and environmental resource where thousands of people from the metro-Atlanta area and beyond come to explore nature and history.

List of Notable Landmarks

- Arabia Mountain: Part of the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, Arabia Mountain is one of the three major Atlanta-area monadnocks, or granite outcrop mountains.
- Panola Mountain: Part of Panola Mountain State Park and a designated National Natural Landmark, Panola Mountain has a different structural composition than other Georgia granite, making it undesirable for quarrying. As a result it was never quarried on a large scale, making Panola Mountain an example of a pristine monadnock ecosystem. Guided hikes allow access to parts of the untouched mountain.
- Flat Rock Archives: One of the oldest African-American communities in Georgia, Flat Rock’s history extends decades before the Civil War. The Flat Rock Archives is responsible for maintaining and preserving the history of this resilient community through historic preservation and education.
- Vaughters’ Farm/Barn: The last dairy landscape in DeKalb County – which was at one point the largest dairy producer in the state of Georgia – Vaughters’ Farm is now part of Panola Mountain State Park. Visitors can visit the iconic Barn, located off of Klondike Road, before meandering on trails through meadow and woodlands.



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- **Monastery of the Holy Spirit:** Built in 1944, this Trappist monastery welcomes visitors to learn about the lives of the monks and their faith. Featuring a poured-concrete abbey on over 2,000 acres of greenspace, as well as a visitor's center that features educational exhibits, a garden store, bakery and bookstore. As well as visiting the chapel and visitors center, you can walk along trails and the Arabia Mountain PATH.
- **AWARE:** Since 2004, the Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort (AWARE) has been rehabilitating and caring for injured wildlife. As well as rehabilitating wild animals, they also educate people in metro Atlanta about Georgia's native animal species.
- **Downtown Lithonia:** The historic "city of stone" was at the center of the quarry industry for much of the 20th century, sending granite from Arabia Mountain to build structures such as the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. The Lithonia granite industry also shipped stone around the world. Today, you can walk through the historic downtown, populated by shops and cafes.
- **Lithonia Women's Club:** The site of DeKalb County's first public lending library, the Women's Club was built in the 1920's as a meeting place for local women for social and political engagement.

About the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance is dedicated to protecting, connecting and sharing the unique history, rich culture and engaging landscapes of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (AMNHA) for the benefit and enjoyment of all. The staff and volunteer board of the Arabia Alliance work with partners across the AMNHA to ensure that everyone can benefit from the cultural and natural resources of the National Heritage Area.

For more information, visit www.arabiaalliance.org.