

## Road Trip # 12

### Childersburg & Sylacauga: Family Fun

Take your family to explore a cave that's 12 stories deep. Eleven miles away, amaze them as your car rolls uphill, seemingly defying the law of gravity. Along the way, you can see how ice cream is made and the location where "stars fell on Alabama." This road trip takes you along U.S. Hwy. 280 between Sylacauga and Harpersville and includes a stop at a drive-in as well as a vineyard, where each September contestants dress up as if they are in an "I Love Lucy" television episode and participate in an annual grape stomp.

### Childersburg – Covered Bridge and Cavern Fun

**Childersburg** [<http://www.childersburg.com/>] is believed to be the location of a Coosa Nation village visited by the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in the fall of 1540. Childersburg calls itself "The Oldest Settlement in America." Named for the explorer, **Desoto Caverns Family Fun Park** [<http://desotocavernspark.com>] (5181 DeSoto Caverns Pkwy.; 256-378-7252) is a magnificent 12-story cave. Guided tours of the cave include a light, sound and water show on every tour. The more than 25 attractions outside the caverns include a maze and wacky water golf. During your visit, be sure to stop by the gift shop for some delicious DeSoto Caverns fudge. This stuff is so good that it's featured as a "must taste" on Alabama Tourism's list of "100 Dishes To Eat in Alabama Before You Die." The park also includes a butterfly house. In warm weather, you can watch the butterflies as they scurry from place to place.

Also on the outskirts of Childersburg are the historic 1864 **Kymulga Grist Mill** and the adjacent **Covered Bridge** built in 1860 [<http://www.childersburg.com/attractions.htm>] (7346 Kymulga Grist Mill Rd.; 256-378-7436). Visit the mill site, walk across the covered bridge that spans Talladega Creek and then explore the nature trails. The Kymulga Grist Mill grounds are the home of the annual Coosa Fest held in late September.

### Where To Eat

If you want to eat where the locals eat, then go where the locals go. That is **Old Town Grille** (50 River Run Road; 256-378-5022). This restaurant, located near Fred's in Childersburg, has high recommendations for its homemade pizzas.

### Vineyard and Drive-In

Drive on U.S. Hwy. 280 across the Coosa River and as you head north toward Harpersville (less than 10 miles), you will reach **Morgan Creek Vineyards** [[www.morgancreekwinery.com](http://www.morgancreekwinery.com)] (181 Morgan Creek Lane, Harpersville; 205-672-2053). This family-owned vineyard and winery offers free guided tours and wine tastings. During its annual Grape Stomp, held the third Saturday in

September, you can crush grapes with your bare feet while listening to live music and watching the “Lucy Look-A-Like” contest recognizing the best Lucille Ball costumes.

A family road trip to this part of Alabama wouldn't be complete without going to the **Harpersville Drive-In** [<http://www.argodrive-in.com/harpersville.php>] (45 Woodland Road; 205-672-8484). This is great evening entertainment for the whole family as you enjoy watching one of two movies on the large 80-by-24-foot screens from the comfort of your car.

### **Where To Stay**

There are more than a half-dozen hotels in the Childersburg/Sylacauga area. You can also stay at **Blue Spring Manor** [<http://www.bluespringmanor.com/index.html>] (2870 Hwy. 83, Vincent; 205-672-9955), a bed and breakfast inn located on 10 acres in Vincent, 20 minutes west of Childersburg or stay at the 3,500-acre **FarmLinks at Pursell Farms** [[www.farmlinks.org](http://www.farmlinks.org)] (2200 FarmLinks Blvd., Sylacauga; 205-403-4653). Located less than 30 minutes from either Sylacauga or Childersburg, FarmLinks is the world's only research and demonstration golf course and includes onsite hunting and fishing as well.

### **Sylacauga's Ice Cream and the Magic of Marble**

#### **Don't Miss: Blue Bell Ice Cream Factory**

Start your trip in **Sylacauga** with a fun walking tour of the **Blue Bell Ice Cream** factory [[http://www.bluebell.com/the\\_little\\_creamery/visiting\\_blue\\_bell/VisitBB\\_Sylacauga.html](http://www.bluebell.com/the_little_creamery/visiting_blue_bell/VisitBB_Sylacauga.html)] (423 N. Norton Ave.; 256-249-6100). Children and adults alike will enjoy seeing exactly how their favorite food items are made, especially when the tour ends with a free ice cream sample. Blue Bell is located a block from city hall. It offers tours Monday through Friday, with the first tour at 9 a.m. and the last starting at 1 p.m. You should call ahead to schedule your place on the 45-minute tour.

No cameras are allowed on the Blue Bell Ice Cream factory floor. But at the end of the tour, you will be given free samples in the ice cream parlor where photography is allowed so be sure to go back to your car and get your camera – this is your chance to take a great souvenir photo that you will treasure, especially if you have young children with you.

Since you are in Sylacauga, which sits atop a bed of mostly white marble, take time to visit the **Isabel Anderson Comer Museum and Arts Center** [<http://comermuseum.weebly.com/>] (711 North Broadway, 256-391-1352). This museum, containing works of art by the Italian sculptor and quarry investor Giuseppe Moretti, is a great place to learn about Sylacauga's marble history. It also has a “Nabors Room,” which celebrates native son Jim Nabors, who gained national fame as both an actor and a singer. Nabors was discovered by Andy Griffith and played the garage attendant Gomer Pyle on the “Andy Griffith Show.” Be sure to tour the upstairs gallery inside the museum, where you will see a copy of the Hodges Meteorite and

newspaper clippings that tell the story of the 8.5-pound rock that fell from the sky and struck Ann Elizabeth Hodges as she napped in a farmhouse in Oak Grove just outside of Sylacauga. Be sure to call ahead to chosen destinations to make sure they will be open during the time of your visit.

You can also view Sylacauga marble sculptures at the **B.B. Comer Memorial Library** [[www.bbcomerlibrary.net](http://www.bbcomerlibrary.net)] (314 N. Broadway; 256-249-0961) where the sculptures from visiting Italian artists are on permanent display. They can be found in the lobby around the stairwell. Another must-see are the 17 paintings that ran as advertising for Avondale Mills in *The Saturday Evening Post*. These paintings by Douglass Crockwell reflect the American way of life in 1948 and are in a similar style to that of Norman Rockwell. Look for the Crockwell painting that includes a very young Doug Layton before he became the longtime color commentator for the University of Alabama Football Radio Network. Layton was born in Sylacauga.

#### Where to Eat

If you're hungry, try either the more laid-back atmosphere of **The Marble City Grill** (112 N. Broadway Ave.; 256-245-8108), located in an old furniture store, or the **Buttermilk Hill Restaurant** [[www.buttermilkhillrestaurant.com](http://www.buttermilkhillrestaurant.com)] (300 East Third St.; 256-207-1001), situated in a 1904 Victorian home. There is a back entrance to The Marble City Grill, making the large parking lot that serves the many stores downtown easily accessible and a joy for those who do not like to park along North Broadway. Buttermilk Hill, which offers more of a white tablecloth dining experience, is located in a spacious home with dining options available in the downstairs rooms or on the front porch.

A great time to visit Sylacauga is during the annual **Magic of Marble Festival** in April. A 10-day event, the festival showcases Sylacauga's beautiful white marble with on-site sculpting, "Marble Mania" scavenger hunts, and an observation point overlooking one of the historic quarries.

Sylacauga is also the ending point of the **Pinhoti 100** [<http://www.pinhoti100.com/>], so if you or someone in your family is an avid runner, fall is also a great time to visit. Held annually in November, the Pinhoti 100 is a point-to-point trail run starting in Heflin, Ala. on the unspoiled Pinhoti single-track trail. Runners make their way over the highest point in Alabama while navigating over rocks, through creeks and across beautiful ridgelines of the Talladega National Forest.

#### Oak Grove – Where "Stars Fell on Alabama" and your Car Rolls Uphill

From Sylacauga, travel north on U.S. Hwy. 280 to the adjacent community of **Oak Grove**, the site of a rare occurrence. An 8.5-pound meteorite crashed into the home of the Guy family on November 30, 1954, striking Elizabeth Ann Hodges. A farmer found another meteorite nearby. These two Oak Grove rocks from the sky are the only known meteors from that day.

To find the location of this unusual event and see the **“Stars Fell on Alabama” historical marker** [<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=44229>] commemorating the occurrence, travel U.S. 280 N. from Sylacauga. When you see the Nissan automobile dealership, exit to the right onto the Old Birmingham Highway. The historical marker will be on your right just before you reach Odens Mill Road.

### **Gravity Hill**

Seeing the site where a meteorite struck a human is bound to be an exciting experience for you and your fellow travelers, but what you'll find really cool about your trip to Oak Grove is **Gravity Hill**, where, oddly enough, cars appear to coast uphill. This last adventure is a great way to end your road trip to the area.

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This oddity happens on a section of Old Hwy. 280, now officially named Gravity Hill. For those with a GPS, it should be easy to find; simply type in Gravity Hill. If your GPS doesn't have the road listed or you're traveling using a map only, closely follow the directions included here.

### **Directions to Gravity Hill**

If you have driven to the “Stars Fell on Alabama” historical marker, return to U.S. Hwy. 280. From the Nissan dealership, travel U.S. Hwy. 280 N. for 1.3 miles where you will see Ogletree's Garage on your right. Directly on the other side of U.S. Hwy. 280 from Ogletree's is Kimberly Road. Exit U.S. Hwy. 280 onto Kimberly Road and then immediately turn onto a small paved road. This will be Gravity Road. If you reach mile marker 38 going north on U.S. Hwy. 280/231, you have gone too far. Turn around and look again for the road that is directly across the divided highway from Ogletree's Garage. Once you've turned onto Kimberly, you will immediately take a left onto Gravity Hill. Please note there's not a road sign for Kimberly Road or Gravity Hill, so the site might be a little difficult to find. Once on Gravity Hill, you will be headed south, parallel to U.S. Hwy. 280. This is a short half-mile road. You will soon reach a stop sign where Gravity Hill intersects with U.S. Hwy. 280. This is where the fun starts.

### **How To Experience Gravity Hill**

You will have the most fun if you position your car south on Gravity Hill so that your car goes uphill backward. Drive to the stop sign on Gravity Hill at the U.S. 280 intersection. Pull up to the stop sign. U.S. 280 should be in front of your car and the rest of Gravity Hill in your rearview mirror. Make sure no one is behind you. Put your car in neutral and take your foot off the brake. Your car should start to roll backward and uphill. Be sure to keep your foot close to the brake pedal, as you will pick up speed as you coast uphill. This little adventure is so amazing that you'll find yourself driving back to the stop sign to try it again.

From Birmingham, go southeast on U.S. Hwy. 280 to Sylacauga, a one-hour drive. From Huntsville you can travel south on U.S. Hwy. 231 to reach Sylacauga. It should take you less

than three hours. From Montgomery you can travel north on U.S. Hwy. 231 to reach Sylacauga in less than 90 minutes.

### **About Sylacauga and Childersburg**

Sylacauga and Childersburg are located only 10 miles apart along a stretch of highway that is both U.S. Hwy. 280 and U.S. Hwy. 231. Sylacauga is best known for being located on top of a bed of pure white marble and as the spot where a meteorite struck a woman resting inside a home in nearby Oak Grove. Childersburg proclaims to be the “Oldest Continually Occupied City in America” with history dating back to the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto.

To share questions or comments about this road trip, please email [grey.brennan@tourism.alabama.gov](mailto:grey.brennan@tourism.alabama.gov) [[grey.brennan@tourism.alabama.gov](mailto:grey.brennan@tourism.alabama.gov) ].