

## DRIVING TOUR III

# The Red Hills

Leave Monroeville on State Highway 21 North. As you leave Courthouse Square on State Highway 21 North, note the turn-of-the-century homes on your left, also, the Monroe County Public Library, which is in the restored LaSalle Hotel, a famous old Monroeville landmark, where Gregory Peck stayed when he visited Harper Lee before filming "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Approximately 15 miles from Monroeville's downtown square, you will pass through the old community of Tunnel Springs, so named because of the old railroad tunnel that goes under the hill at Tunnel Springs.



*O.B. Finklea Store in Beatrice*

Continue on to Beatrice, approximately 18 miles from Courthouse Square. Turn left on Highway 265. Follow it through town. Look for the Finklea Store on your right after you come in to downtown Beatrice, an old railroad town. The Finklea Store has been recently restored by the Steele family of Beatrice. The store has interesting artifacts dating from its early days, including a license plate collection and an old cigar cutter. Today, the store sells everything from hunting supplies and seed and feed to gardening tools and snacks.

Follow 265 north, 5 miles, to intersection with Co. Rd. 56, turn right, go .4 mile to Rikard's Mill, a restored operating grist mill, and scenic park, managed by the Monroe County Museum. The mill is open on Friday and Saturdays 11am-5pm., April- December. Follow 265 north, to Jake Rikard's resting place. A cemetery, on your right, 0.3 miles north of the entrance to Rikard's Mill, the grist mill he built in 1845. Turn around and go back to Co. Rd. 56, and turn right.



*Rikard's Mill*

Drive 6.6 miles on Highway 56 East through Buena Vista, most distinguished by the inactive Buena Vista Post Office and school, old Victorian homes, the Concord Baptist Church, and the Buena Vista Cemetery. View the historical marker there. Continue on to Vredenburgh, an old sawmill town.

Vredenburgh was built in 1912 as a company town by Peter Vredenburgh, Jr., and most of the homes you see here were built of heart pine as company homes. The sawmill closed in the 1970's, and several of the original "company" families have chosen to stay in Vredenburgh. The community is remote and there is virtually no employment. The Catholic Church maintains a mission (The Edmundites) in the town to help care for the citizens. The Vredenburgh Post Office is a great place for photographs, and next door to the post office is a thrift shop maintained by the Edmundites for the townspeople.

The drive around Vredenburgh takes you around what was once a city park maintained by the Vredenburghs in the heyday of the sawmill. Drive around town and out the other side to a four-way intersection, go straight 3 miles to Hybart.

The railroad runs through Hybart, marked by a black and white sign on the rail line announcing "Hybart." Immediately past the railroad tracks is the tiny Hybart Post Office (closed in 1978) and Gaines' Grocery (open 6am to 5:30pm Monday -Thursday, 6am-6pm Friday and Saturday, 7am-1pm on Sunday). Hybart is a very picturesque community and a great place for photographs! It is the hometown of U. S. Senator Jeff Sessions.

At Hybart, at intersection of Co. Rd. 56 & Hwy. 41, turn left. Follow Hwy. 41 2 miles to Bell's Landing. This was the second largest steamboat landing in Monroe County in the 1820's, with Claiborne being the largest. As you drive through Bell's Landing, note the McCants-Luker House, c. 1845, on your right, and two churches on your left. Bell's Landing Presbyterian Church, the first church on your left, was built on its present location in 1885. The building was virtually destroyed by a storm on May 10, 1927. The present church was built then. The original church, located north of here, dates from 1819. Bell's Landing Methodist Church was built in 1884.

Continue on Hwy. 41, 5.3 miles to McDuffie Place. The old McDuffie home burned in 1941, but log cabins are still standing on the place. (The McDuffie Place is 7.2 miles from intersection of Co. Rd. 56 & Hwy. 41.) This property is owned by Virginia Hybart Taylor of Montrose, Alabama. (Mrs. Taylor grew up in Monroeville where her father was local attorney Charlie Hybart, whose law offices were located upstairs in Mrs. Jenny Faulk's building on the east side of the Monroeville Square, next to the post office. Mrs. Faulk was Truman Capote's cousin - her hat shop was located downstairs. Mrs. Taylor's mother, Marion McDuffie grew up at the old McDuffie home.)

Continue south on Hwy. 41 — 2.5 miles to Franklin. Franklin has several restored buildings — Rutherford Bros. Store, Dr. Rutherford's office, Franklin School House, First United Methodist Church. The buildings have been privately restored through the Rutherford family of Mobile.

The Red Hills around Franklin are also home to the endangered Red Hill Salamander, now



*Franklin*

the state amphibian.

At Franklin, once called River Ridge, (first post office built in 1856) turn around and re-drive Hwy 41 north for 0.8 miles to Hwy. 17.

Turn left onto Hwy 17. On this drive there are several old private homes to note as you drive by. You will pass the intersection of Co. Rd. 49 that leads to the Alabama River and Haines Island. Here you will find a ferryboat that operates on weekdays only (hours 8 am to 4 pm) and depending on river conditions. Picnic tables on the riverbank are also available here.

Continue on Hwy. 17 loop to the intersection of Hwy 13 (Lock & Dam Road); turn right onto Hwy. 13. In 1.5 mi. turn left to Claiborne Lock and Dam and the Alabama River Museum. As you travel this road, look for the Williams Plantation, which will be on your left. The two-story home is one of the oldest homes in the county, and at one time, this area was considered part of the town of Claiborne, population 6,000 in the 1830's.

Continue to the Claiborne Lock & Dam on the Alabama River. The Alabama River Museum (temporarily closed) is on the



*On Lock & Dam Road, you will notice an old plantation house at what was once a river landing known as Finchburg. The house is the family home of Harper Lee's grandmother, Ellen Williams.*

right just before you reach the Lock & Dam. The Alabama River Museum houses a collection of steamboat relics, Native American artifacts and fossils. There is a boat ramp and hiking trail to the left. A camp ground and a boat ramp are to the right. The lock and dam and picnic areas are maintained by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. There is a wonderful covered pavilion that may also be reserved through the Corps. This was the site of

the steamboat landing called Williams Landing.

When leaving the Lock & Dam, retrace drive to Hwy. 17, turn right onto Hwy. 17. Look out for Finchburg Grocery Store, (open 5:30 am to 7:00 pm Monday - Saturday, 5:30 am to 6:00 pm Sunday) which will be on your right on Hwy. 17. Finchburg Grocery has a deli that serves fried chicken, etc., and is a convenience store and gas stop.

At intersection with Hwy. 41, turn right and return to Courthouse Square (8 mi).

For more information, see Monroe County Heritage Museum publications: *Legacy - Monroeville*; *Historical Quarterly - Tunnel Springs*; *Legacy - Rikard's Mill/Chestnut/Buena Vista*; *Legacy-Vredenburgh*; *Legacy - Bell's Landing*; *Legacy - Franklin*; *Legacy - Steamboats A 'Landing'*, *Legacy - A Tugboat Captain's Scrapbook*.

All information, including open hours and site availability are subject to change. Please call ahead for accurately updated information. Monroe County Museum (251) 575-7433, or visit [MonroeCountyMuseum.org](http://MonroeCountyMuseum.org)

