



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2025.05.12
Stone Mountain of Georgia



A rainy morning gave way to an afternoon that waffled between partly sunny and partly cloudy. Or maybe it was between mostly cloudy and mostly sunny. Hard to tell sometimes, you know?

I pulled into the parking lot on the west side of the mountain, at the head of the Walk-Up Trail. Despite the simple name, the WUT is labeled as a Very Strenuous hike. It's only 1.3 miles each way, but the elevation gain is 786 feet. So, that's about a 9% grade, on average. That much of a climb might earn the Strenuous ranking, but it's the ground underfoot that warrants the Very part.

The entire trail is across stone boulders. They are large and uneven, so a constant mix of choppy steps and high steps was required all the way to the top.





Above the timber line, it steepens dramatically and becomes a real lung sucker.

It was a nice view from up there, though. To the west, the skyline of Atlanta was discernible on the horizon (left side of photo, above). The wind was rather strong, as you'd expect on an exposed summit of the tallest hill for many miles, but the day was warm, so it was comfortable enough to hang out and enjoy the vibe for a while before the long walk down.

I took Little Bird out of his pouch and sent him up to have a look-see. I thought about shooting a fly-away-backwards video, starting with me sitting under a small tree and LB soaring back-and-up for a gradual reveal of this humungous rocky perch I was on. Sounds kinda cool, right?



Well, LB did not get far before some big hawk took way too much interest in him. The feathered bird swooped by to buzz the propped one, then banked hard for a second go-round at him.

Fearing a terrible mismatch, I quickly dropped LB down and steered him back my way. The hawk recognized the retreat and did not give chase. It did, however, keep slowly circling the general area. Maybe a nest was around here somewhere, but I was not about to go hunting for it. Abandon video quest. Time to go.

It's not unusual for visitors to a place like this to leave some graffiti behind to let all of us know what a true douchebag had been here. Well, a couple of these visitors needed to get a life. These rocks are granite (and a whole lot of other ingredients), so it is not an easy carve like some of the autographs in the soft sandstone at a place like the Sand Caves in Utah. Yet there were some astounding "signatures", the most impressive of which was this one: → → → → →



Charlie Bradfield, WTF, my man? How long did this take???? Maybe there was not much to do 'round these parts in 1913, but, dayummmm, this took serious commitment! That's *carved*, not painted. With 111+ years of foot traffic, wind, rain and ice gnawing away at it, it's still finger-width deep .

(Henry's, above, wasn't bad either, but the "WOW" on Charlie's is right on point.)

Once down on level ground, I drove Blue Maxx to the lots on the north side of the mountain. You get a much better sense of the enormity of it from here. And you get to see the carving that has made this big rock a pre-eminent — and controversial — attraction.

Stone Mountain is an enormous granite bump on an otherwise pretty-flat plain. It was placed here by Welsh Druids in the early Enigmatic Ages. They did not identify themselves as Welsh, since Wales was not established as a country until much later. Geologists still cannot come up with a reasonable theory about how a group of

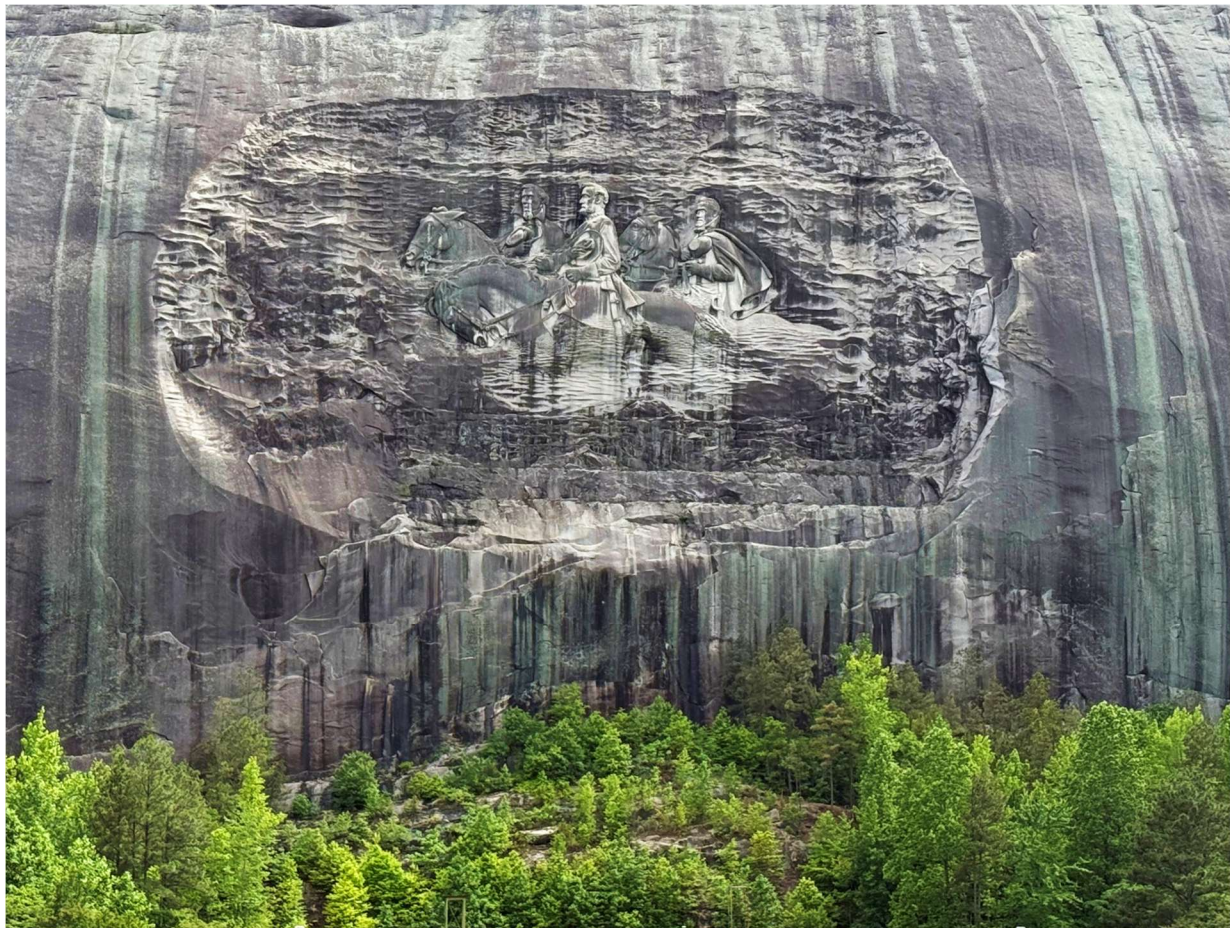
scrawny, bearded, robed, religious zealots were able to move this gargantuan rock across the stormy Atlantic into its current position. Or why.

OK, yes, all that is bullshit — just making sure you were paying attention — but it almost sounds more sensible than Wikipedia's account:

Stone Mountain is a pluton, a type of igneous intrusion. Primarily composed of quartz monzonite ... though often called a pink granite dome, actually ranges in composition from quartz monzonite to granite and granodiorite. The minerals within the rock include quartz, plagioclase feldspar, microcline, and muscovite, with smaller amounts of biotite and tourmaline.

OK, so which version is more fun? The Druids, right? Damn right. Fiction sets you free.

This is the largest bas-relief carving in the known universe. The sculpture was cut 42 feet deep into the mountain, measures 90 feet in height and 190 feet in width, and stands 400 feet above the ground. Read those numbers again. This pluton is humongous, so even something that large looks puny on its face. 42 feet deep!!!!



Obviously, it's a Confederate Army memorial, with the three prominent figures of that ill-fated rebellion — President Jefferson Davis, and generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson — depicted on horseback. (Their horses were Blackjack, Traveler, and Little Sorrel, respectively. Now you know.) The history of this hill is whacked, including KKK cross-burning rallies on the summit.

The carving was commissioned in 1916, but the physical work did not start until early 1925. The original team leader was Gutson Borglum, the same dude who would go on to carve Mount Rushmore. Gutson lasted less than a year. He pissed people off and was fired. He had to flee the state to escape arrest (or worse — he was a damn Yankee, after all). People were so upset that they even blasted Jackson's partially completed head right off the wall. [Georgia's loss was South Dakota's gain — work on Mount Rushmore began in 1927.]

The Stone Mountain project languished in limbo, with only sporadic attempts to continue, till after WW2 — all the time with that ugly, blasted mess on the mountain's face. Work did not resume in earnest until the state appropriated funds in 1965. There was great rejoicing, including a ceremony on April 14, 1965 - a date specifically chosen because it was 100 years to the day after Lincoln's assassination. I dunno... that's pretty messed up, y'all.

The sculpture was not actually completed until 1972. I can't believe it is that recent. That's **107 years after** the Civil War ended! (And 56 years after the concept was first approved.)

There are some family entertainment things to do on the grounds: SkyRide, Historic Square, picnic areas, Ride The Ducks (whatever that is), meadows, a big lake, a golf course, a lodge, and the Memorial Lawn where special gatherings are held. This wide, sloped lawn spreads upward from the trees at the base of the pluton, a few hundred yards up to the Memorial Hall Visitor Center. This location offers the best view of the monument and is the site of the nighttime lighting and laser shows.

I parked a couple hundred yards from the MHVC and sent Little Bird aloft to get some unique plutonic views. Several stills and a couple of videos later, I reeled him back in. There was no sign that any other flying things had objected to his presence. I would have deferred to them if they had. That's one of the prime tenets of drone flying: leave the damn birds alone!

After all the recent rain, streams of runoff had left dark gray, vertical wet streaks across the carving, making much of it practically unrecognizable. Little Bird also snapped a few really nice scenic shots of the surrounding areas to the north and east.





With aerial pics and vids secured, I was content with my stop. It was time to head to my Site For The Nite.

I do put some planning into these RoadMode adventures; they are not just wung. Winging it would mean a lot of stealth episodes in hotel lots or in rest areas or on city/town streets. I don't need that much uncertainty and anxiety in my life.

Joining Harvest Hosts and Boondockers Welcome is probably the smartest thing I did when I converted to VanLife (getting a Black Card Membership to every Planet Fitness location in North America was second smartest, I reckon). And over the last three years, I have grown especially fond of two types of host: golf courses and breweries/brewpubs. Both have the same net gain: I get an afternoon-into-evening of something I really enjoy doing, then I just crawl off to sleep in Blue Maxx for a secure and worry-free night. What could be better?

[OK, I can answer that question myself: the good people of Boondockers Welcome. With good vibes, empathy, charity and friendliness, they offer their personal space to us odd wanderers and are glad to do it, with *nothing asked for in return*. Truly remarkable. They restore my faith in humanity.]

So, as I laid out the plans for Stage 1 of RM25 – a week-plus to go from Jacksonville to Boston, via a creative inland route – I made it a Host-Hopping spree. Six of the next eight nights (starting tonight) would be spent at brewpubs. Bring on the IPA's, you happy, hoppy hosts!



Catecay River Brewing Company, East Ellijay, GA



