

## **Down Mobile Way - 1935**

Narrator: If you'd have a peace of mind, a heart that cannot harden, go find the door that opens wide upon an azalea garden. Almost 200 years ago, Francois Ludgere Diard brought azaleas – pink, purplish-red, and white – from Toulouse to Mobile, Alabama. These were the first azaleas planted in this charming old southern coastal city. They had come from China, their native home, by way of southern France. From that moment, azaleas began to make Mobile distinctively beautiful. Who has not heard of her Azalea Trail, a drive beginning in the very heart of the city, which in late February or March leads thousands of visitors through a riot of color applied, as someone has said, by a giant's 10-mile brush? Past fine old homes, many of them reflecting in their architecture the history of the city, since its founding by the French in 1711 under five flags: French, English, Spanish, Confederate, and United States. The frozen lace of the French is perhaps most distinctive.

Modern Mobile is proud of the state-owned dock system, built at an original cost of 10 million dollars, through which passes practically all of Alabama's foreign commerce. The port terminal railway, which connects all of the railway lines entering the city with the docks, is also owned by the state. A channel 30 miles long and 30 feet deep leads from the docks down through historic Mobile Bay, to the open Gulf of Mexico. A fair share of the South's export cotton crop goes through the port. Turpentine and other naval stores products from southern forests are also shipped. The United States consumes about 50 million bunches of bananas a year. Most of them come from Central America, notably Honduras. Their import is recorded by the United States Department of Commerce by customs districts. The New Orleans and Philadelphia districts lead the way, each with about 12 million bunches per year. The figure for the Mobile district in 1934 was approximately 2 million bunches.

Three state parks – Gulf near Foley, Cedar Creek at Citronelle, and Little River near Uriah and Atmore – will serve the Mobile area. Their principle draw will be from six counties – Mobile, Washington, Clark, Monroe, Escambia, and Baldwin – with a total population of a quarter million. Unusual features of Gulf State Park in Baldwin County are its location on the Gulf of Mexico and the presence of three large freshwater lakes within its boundaries. These lakes are said to be the only bodies of fresh water of noticeable size along the entire Gulf coast.

The coast country around Mobile is famed for its fishing. The Alabama Deep Sea Rodeo, held each year late in August, directs attention to the presence around the mouth of Mobile Bay of tarpon, the silver king of the sea, and other fighting members of the finny tribe which choose saltwater for their habitat. But rivers, coastal canals, and the occasional lakes are equally interesting to sportsmen because of their plentitude of freshwater fish. Park development at Gulf State has included the joining of the three lakes by artificial channels to provide one of the south's fine freshwater fishing spots. Scarcely more than a stone's throw from the lake, across dunes of snow-white sand, the surf of the Gulf of Mexico breaks on the shore land of the park. Bathing pavilions are to be erected here for park visitors.

The commonplace, but necessary, job of building vehicle trails in the parks presents varying problems for the Civilian Conservation Corps to solve. Rock and gravel, the usual road building materials, are scarce in the Gulf State area. Muck, washed into pits by frequent rains, is thrown up on the soil to bind its sandy looseness. Most structures in the park are on or near the lake shores. There are piers for fishing, boating, and swimming. Native timber, hand-hewn and expertly fitted by the Corps boys, is the material used. Piles on which the shore structures rest are jettied down, that is eased into close-fitting holes in the lake bottom made by washing out the sand with jets of water under pressure. This ancient fire engine once did human service on the streets of Pensacola, Florida not so many miles away, before

it was replaced by more modern equipment and turned its energies of steam to less exciting tasks than firefighting.

Alabama, with the aid of the Emergency Conservation Work Program, is building a wealth of health-giving recreation in this splendid park. Lazy days in the glorious sunshine of the South.

It's a shorter and easier haul out of Mobile, north and slightly west, to Cedar Creek State Park near Citronelle in Mobile County. Here are almost 700 acres in the heart of a district which once produced much of Alabama's income from lumber. The Corps' biggest job here is the construction of a lake for recreational purposes. A small but constant stream of clear water will fill it, and earthen breastworks will hold it. One of the principal park roads will cross the crest of the dam. Necessary building rock is split out of outcroppings near the park. This old Negro is a park attraction. He comes from a shack nearby to recite a remarkable eyewitness story of the capture of Fort Morgan near Mobile by the Union forces during the War Between the States.

Little River State Park is just a few miles from Atmore, the seat of an Alabama prison farm. Here is grown and packed a great deal of the food required by inmates of the state's other penal institutions. Federal help in the building of state parks is extended after states have acquired land on which suitable parks can be developed. In Alabama, considerable park land has been turned back to the state, through gift or purchase at a nominal sum, by large lumber companies which once operated in the state. The 2,120 acres in Little River State Park were so acquired. A well-organized fire prevention system protects not only the state park property, but many thousands of acres of privately owned land nearby.

Here also there will be a dam for recreational purposes. Careful examination of soil conditions is made to ensure permanency of construction. Overnight cabins and other park structures will be clustered about the water area. And something has to be done about mosquitoes. Conservation Corps enrollees here are Negro boys who have become good carpenters, as these buildings testify.

In Alabama, as in many other sections of the United States, there's come quick indication of the popularity of the state park movement, which has been given its greatest emphasis by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It takes years to build a park, and long before Little River was completed it was being used by folks from many miles around.

Yes, it just had to happen: the discovery of the biggest feet in the Civilian Conservation Corps. And this covers a lot of territory, for up to August 1, 1936, 1,556,295 men had been enrolled. The size? Well, they're fifteens, which you get a better idea by comparison. The Quartermaster's Department of the United States Army had to supply them on special order. And still this happy son of the sun-tanned south sure can pick'em up and lay'em down!