HOW TO "SEE" THE WETUMPKA IMPACT CRATER:

Self-guided Driving Tour

See Attached Maps

The city of Wetumpka, Alabama sits right on the bulls-eye of what is thought to be Alabama's greatest natural disaster. Almost 85 million years ago, a crater was created by a meteor blast deep into the bedrock under a shallow sea. The hills, east of downtown, are the eroded remains of the rim of the almost five-mile-wide, Wetumpka Impact Crater. Rising up out of the Alabama Coastal Plain, the, crescent-shaped crater was formed when a large meteor impacted the Earth's surface in what would later become Wetumpka.

One of the most common questions asked by visitors to Wetumpka, Alabama is "How can I see the Wetumpka Impact Crater?" It is very visible, but most area residents take the unusual terrain for granted. The Wetumpka Impact Crater Commission reminds individuals, who want to tour, that many of the best views are on private property and it is important to respect property owner's rights.

However, the Crater Commission has placed "Educational Viewpoint Signs" in public places so that visitors can view and better understand the crater. These self-guided directions and attached maps are meant to serve only as suggestions. The order of visiting Viewpoint Sign sites is not important, but signs are numbered for location and identification.

Driving towards the city of Wetumpka, you can see the large hills rising up on the east side of US Highway 231 and south of Alabama Highway 14. The eastern crater rim is also visible along Fire Tower Road. From US Highway 231, several communication towers can be seen at Bald Knob, the highest point along the crater rim (elevation 587 feet). From Wallsboro, to the north; Prattville, west; and Montgomery, south, there are excellent vista views of the crater rim as you approach Wetumpka.

A good place to start your tour is in front of the Elmore County Health Department on US Highway 231. An Alabama Historical Association marker (See AHA on the map) has been erected to recount the story of the Wetumpka Impact Crater. The location of the marker is approximately halfway between Bald Knob (Sign 2) and the rocks from the crater in the Coosa River (Sign 7).

From the Health Department, drive south on US Highway 231 to (Sign 1) located behind First Community Bank. The rear parking area is one of the best places to see up-close, rock representative of the crater rim. The bedrock of the north and northwestern crater rim is comprised of mica schist, a type of metamorphic rock common in the Alabama Piedmont. In this area, the bedrock dips in a north to northwest direction due to displacement caused by the explosion when the meteor impacted the Earth's surface.

From the bank, continue south on Highway 231 and turn left onto Knight Street (beside Smokin' S Bar-B-Que), left onto Hillside Drive, left onto Enslen Road, then left onto Bald Knob Road. Be careful on Bald Knob Road; it is narrow and will not always allow for two cars to pass. Continue along Bald Knob Road for almost a mile. The unusual terrain here is quite beautiful. Watch for the Educational Viewpoint Sign # 2 on your right (9/10th of a mile). There is limited parking. From this vantage point along the rim, you can look down the utility line right-of-way, across the floor of the crater.

Retrace your path back to Highway 231, and drive south to the intersection of River Oaks and Old Montgomery Highway, turn left onto Old Montgomery Highway and take the next left onto Jasmine Hill Road. In a short distance, turn left onto Harrogate Springs Road.

Approximately one mile east of the Jasmine Hill Road intersection is an area referred to locally as "the cliffs." "The cliffs" (Sign 3) can be viewed from the north side of Harrogate Springs Road. The Educational Viewpoint Sign # 3 is in a low area where a utility line right-of-way is located. Be careful pulling off the road here. The best viewing at this location may be when you return, driving on the north side of the road.

"The cliffs" is an unusual gully made up of five mega-blocks of material that fell into the crater immediately after the impact as well as material that washed into the crater by the impact tsunami. The highly eroded sediments now appear as approximately 40-foot-high white-colored cliffs inside the crater rim area. It is important to note that "the cliffs" area is private property and should not be entered without permission of the property owner.

Continuing east on Harrogate Springs Road from "the cliffs" area, you will come to the intersection of Buck Ridge Road and Trotter's Trail, the center of the impact crater. Turn right on Buck Ridge and see the center bedrock (Sign 4) evidence of the epicenter of Alabama's greatest natural disaster, equal to an earthquake measuring 8.5 to 9 on the Richter scale.

Follow Buck Ridge back to Trotter's Trail, turn left to return to Wetumpka. The natural gas pipeline right-of-way intersecting Trotter's Trail (Sign 5) provides an excellent view of the eastern rim of the crater. Return on Harrogate Springs Road back to Highway 231 then drive north to Highway 14 and turn left to go across the Coosa River.

The Educational Viewpoint Sign # 6 is located near the entrance to the Wetumpka Sportsplex on the Coosa Parkway (Highway 14), west of the Coosa River. The view from the Sportsplex is of the eroded north and western crater rims. The visible communication towers are located at Bald Knob (Sign 2), 587 feet above sea level.

Returning to Wetumpka by Highway 111 and Bridge Street takes you over the Bibb Graves Bridge, downtown. As you travel over the bridge, you can see large rocks in the bed of the Coosa River (Sign 7) that were ejected from the crater when it was formed. If you look closely, you will notice that they tilt in the upstream direction. When the water level in the river is high, these rocks are not visible. Educational Viewpoint Sign # 7 is located on the east side of the Coosa River, behind Hill Street, near the Old Calaboose.

The City of Wetumpka is proud to possess some of the oldest recorded history in the state of Alabama. The Wetumpka Impact Crater is registered on the Earth Impact Database as one of 190 craters world-wide. Because the area would have been under sea water at the time of impact, it is said to be "one of the best preserved marine impact craters in the world".

For more information please contact the Wetumpka Impact Crater Commission
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