

Off the Main Road

Put your SUV in gear, and get ready for the most beautiful drive in Alabama.

Go ahead, press it. If that four-wheel drive button stares back at you in the carpool line, if it mocks you in traffic going to work, if the closest you've gotten to taking your SUV off-road is the parking lot at Piggly Wiggly—you need to visit Clay County, Alabama.

Another World

Though it sits fewer than 100 miles from both Atlanta and Birmingham, Clay County seems a world away. Quiet and full of unspoiled natural beauty, it's the perfect place to enjoy an undiscovered drive in the country. Plus, it won't take long to get there.

The county has created four trails: one for SUVs, two for cars, and one for motorcycles. Each is clearly marked with signs, and a comprehensive map is available from the chamber of commerce. That makes it almost impossible to get lost.

Cherokee Connection

The routes are collectively called the Tsalagi (Cherokee) Trails, and they all sport Cherokee names. The Gana Trail is for SUVs. It winds over mostly dirt roads, fords three creeks, and takes in parts of Alabama's Treasure Forest. The Wa Lo Si Trail is perfect for antique or collector cars. It stays on paved roads and tools by Lake Wedowee, Harris Dam, Flat Rock Park, and the town of Cragford. The A Wi Trail is designed for motorcycles, twisting and turning around 242 curves along Skyline Drive and Cheaha Mountain. Finally, the No Tsi Trail will be of particular interest to anyone who has a sports



left: Have Jeep, will travel: Follow Clay County's driving trails for beautiful back-road scenery.



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARY MARGARET CHAMBLISS

above: The 58-mile Gana Trail takes drivers past three creeks and a small waterfall.

left: Enhance your trip with a stop beside a gorgeous lake.

car. (The signs for the course, in fact, are illustrated with a Morgan, a classic British sports car, which should give any enthusiast an idea of how serious the county is about attracting drivers.)

Leisurely Afternoon

Clay County sparkles this time of year. Take our advice, and travel the Gana Trail. You'll wind through dense forests of pine, silver oaks, and sugar maples. It's completely possible to drive the entire 58 miles and never see another car or person. Take a

picnic, and pull over for lunch by a lake. Don't worry if the creeks are high—each ford can be avoided by taking an alternate route. There are a few ruts in the road, making a truck or SUV a must—but when you're done, with a little mud on your flaps, we're sure you'll never look at four-wheel drive the same again.

—MORGAN MURPHY

For more information or to request a trail map: Clay County Chamber of Commerce, (256) 396-2828, or Alabama Department of Tourism, 1-800-252-2262. ♦

