

Macon's wonderful parks exercise the body and mind

By Rick Maier

It surprises me how few local license plates I find in the parking lots of the parks around Macon. Native Middle Georgians probably recall their school trips to these places and figure that they've been there and done that.

Having visited most of the parks, I find myself returning to three on a regular basis - Ocmulgee National Monument, Rose Hill Cemetery and Henry Burns Park.

I've tried to figure out what makes these three places so special. Like most parks they are beautiful places to exercise, picnic or just take in the great outdoors. They're rich in history, and frequented by lots of interesting people. But I discovered another common trait – they're all very hilly.

I like standing on high ground, almost as much as I enjoy sitting on the beach. Both make me forget all the fuss and stress of daily life, and when I get relaxed, my mind begins to wander. These mental escapes take a different direction at each of the three parks.

Looking deep into past

At the Ocmulgee National Monument, I stand on top of the Great Temple mound and try to visualize the ancients as they lived thousands of years ago (the movie and displays in the Visitor Center help a lot). But I am distracted by the roar of nearby traffic, the view of railroad tracks and roadways crisscrossing the site, the thought of lights robbing the night of its darkness and the sight of trash in the creek beds.

And what a shame that we can't access the Ocmulgee River from the park – the very reason for this settlement and all that would follow it.

For a few moments I feel like that Indian in the old anti-littering commercial with a tear running down his cheek - and that's quite a distance for a pro-development conservative like me. The park takes me back to more basic times, and helps put things in perspective.

Monument to diversity

Further upstream, Rose Hill Cemetery is an incredible monument to some of those who helped build the Macon community we enjoy today. The existence of a big Jewish cemetery, the graves of the Allman Brothers, and a large Confederate cemetery - all in close proximity to one another within Rose Hill - is a striking symbol of the cultural diversity of Macon's past and present.

I like to go to the back section near the river and explore the sections of the cemetery you can't see from the road. I'm amazed at those tombs in the brick walls built into the sides of the hills, and I hate all the smaller burial stones with too few years between the dates on the markers.

I try to figure out something about the lives of some of the people buried at Rose Hill from the words carved into the stone markers, or their relation to nearby graves. I think about all the days these people toiled and worried - and laughed and played - and yet we know so little about them. It helps me remember to not sweat the small stuff and make the best of the time I have on the green side of the ground.

Invited to be a kid

On to Ridge and Ingleside Avenues. If I ask my kids what park they want to visit it's always Burns Park. We pass three other playgrounds to get there. I like Burns because the place invites you to be a kid again - you'll see adults swinging, sliding, climbing and making faces in the new crazy mirrors.

The new playground equipment at Burns is wonderful. It was donated by a very generous, long-time Bibb County citizen who wanted to provide a playground that would be accessible to the disabled.

And there are other parks to explore. My next goal will be to visit Browns Mount and the Lamar Mounds. I recently visited the new Town Creek Reservoir and was amazed at the breathtaking beauty of the property. I look forward to greater public access that is planned for the future.

We spend too much of our time each day indoors near a power supply. A trip to the park can exercise our bodies and minds, and put us back in touch with nature and history. Give it a try, and take a kid along to remind you how to relax.

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