

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Pinson Mounds State Archaeological Park

By Fran Wallas

The best way to start this three to six mile hike at Pinson Mounds State Archaeological Park in Pinson is to explore the exhibits in the museum. You will learn about the Native Americans who were here more than 1,500 years ago.

This site, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is the largest Middle Woodland complex in the Southeast and contains at least 12 pre-historic mounds. The site is also registered as a National Historic Landmark.

The trail begins outside the back door of the museum. Saul's Mound 9 rises in front of you 72 feet high. Walk towards Mound 9 on the path through the open field. Go half way around the mound to the right. If you are feeling energetic, climb the 125 steps to the top. You can view the mound complex and the fall colors of the oak hickory forest along the edges of the field.

When you get back down, take the path leading to mounds 12-15 on your right. There are interpretive signs telling you about each of the mounds. The mounds differ in both shape and purpose.

At the trail junction, go right to the Duck's Nest, a depression that looks like a large nest. The trail then leads to a long boardwalk weaving through a

wetland with large cypress trees. There is a secluded resting spot with benches next to the Forked Deer River. You may want to stop here for a snack or sit quietly with your binoculars watching for birds and deer.

When you get to the end of the boardwalk, go up the steps and follow the trail until you see the sign "museum." Go right on the nature trail that is blazed in red and is a footpath only. Then, go down steps and up steps through a grove of beech trees with the wetlands on your right. You will start to understand one of the reasons the Native Americans may have chosen this site. Food would have been abundant. There are still many nut trees, persimmons, blackberries and raspberries as well as fish and waterfowl.

There is another junction just after a bridge. If you go left, you go past the southwestern part of the Eastern Citadel and have a shorter route back to the museum. If you go right you will get to Mound 30, 29, and the northeastern part of the Eastern Citadel. The best way to see the site is to use the map and wander through the mound site. There is no wrong or right way to get a feel for this incredible place. You may choose to walk only a mile around the site or you may choose



The wetland along the boardwalk at Pinson Mounds. Below: Saul's Mound at Pinson Mounds. Note the observation tower on top.

to spend the whole day exploring the different paths.

The annual event Archaeofest is set for Pinson Mounds on September 19-20. Archaeofest celebrates Native American culture and archaeology. There are craft demonstrations, Native American dances and storytelling.

### Directions

Take Highway 40 to Highway 45S in Jackson. Go south on Highway 45S to the town of Pinson and follow the brown state park signs 2.5 miles to Pinson Mounds. Park in the museum/visitor center parking lot. Trail maps are available at the museum.

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(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks on the Web site [www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes](http://www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes).)

