

A
FALCON
GUIDE[®]

Best Easy Day Hikes **Dallas/ Fort Worth**

WHERE TO HIKE SERIES



KATHRYN HOPPER

A
FALCON
GUIDE®

Best Easy Day Hikes **Dallas/ Fort Worth**

WHERE TO HIKE SERIES



KATHRYN HOPPER

B e s t E a s y D a y H i k e s S e r i e s

Best Easy Day Hikes Dallas/Fort Worth

Kathryn Hopper

FALCON GUIDES

GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT
HELENA, MONTANA

AN IMPRINT OF GLOBE PEQUOT PRESS

Help Us Keep This Guide Up to Date

Every effort has been made by the author and editors to make this guide as accurate and useful as possible. However, many things can change after a guide is published—trails are rerouted, regulations change, facilities come under new management, etc.

We would love to hear from you concerning your experiences with this guide and how you feel it could be improved and kept up to date. While we may not be able to respond to all comments and suggestions, we'll take them to heart and we'll also make certain to share them with the author. Please send your comments and suggestions to the following address:

Globe Pequot Press
Reader Response/Editorial Department
P.O. Box 480
Guilford, CT 06437

Or you may e-mail us at:

editorial@GlobePequot.com

Thanks for your input, and happy trails!

Copyright © 2010 by Morris Book Publishing, LLC

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed to Globe Pequot Press, Attn: Rights and Permissions Department, P.O. Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437.

Falcon, FalconGuides, and Outfit Your Mind are registered trademarks of Morris Book Publishing, LLC.

Project editor: Jessica Haberman

Maps: Off Route Inc. © Morris Book Publishing, LLC

TOPO! Explorer software and SuperQuad source maps courtesy of National Geographic Maps. For information about TOPO! Explorer, TOPO!, and Nat Geo Maps products, go to www.topo.com or www.natgeomaps.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hopper, Kathryn.

Best easy day hikes, Dallas/Fort Worth / Kathryn Hopper.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4930-0501-7

1. Hiking--Texas--Dallas--Guidebooks. 2. Hiking--Texas--Fort Worth--Guidebooks. 3. Dallas (Tex.)--Guidebooks. 4. Fort Worth (Tex.)--Guidebooks. I. Title.

GV199.42.T492D354 2010

917.64'2812--dc22

2009026709

FALCONGUIDES®

The author and Globe Pequot Press assume no liability for accidents happening to, or injuries sustained by, readers who engage in the activities described in this book.

Contents

Dallas/Fort Worth Overview Map

Acknowledgments

Introduction

How to Use This Guide

Trail Finder

Map Legend

The Hikes

1 Katy Trail

2 White Rock Lake Trail

3 Trinity River Audubon Center

4 Cedar Hill State Park: Talala Trail

5 Cedar Ridge Preserve: Cattail Pond Trail

6 Breckenridge Park

7 Spring Creek Preserve Trail

8 Arbor Hills Loop

9 Heard Wildlife Sanctuary: Wood Duck Trail

10 L. B. Houston Nature Trail

11 Little Bear Creek Trail

12 Lake Grapevine Horseshoe Trail

13 Walnut Grove Trail

14 Bob Jones Nature Center Trail

15 Colleyville Nature Center Trail

16 River Legacy Park Trail

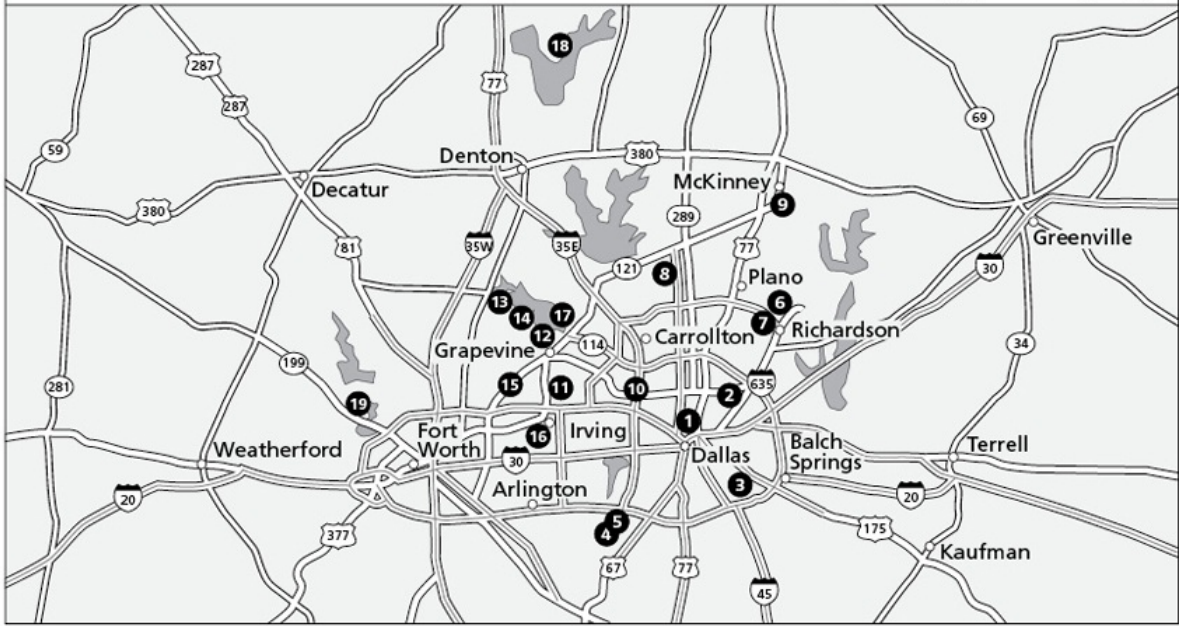
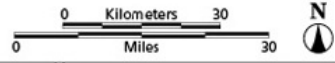
17 North Shore Trail

18 Ray Roberts Lake State Park: Johnson Branch Trail

19 Fort Worth Nature Center

About the Author

Dallas/Fort Worth Overview



Acknowledgments

Thanks to my hiking partners, including Stuart, James, Henry, Will, and Andrew Tonkinson. For advice on birds and other wildlife, thanks to the Dallas Chapter of the National Audubon Association, Bob Jones Nature Center, the Fort Worth Nature Center, and Heard Nature Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary. And special thanks to Bud Kennedy.

Introduction

North Texas is not a traditional hiking mecca, but the region's 6.1 million-plus residents can actually find a wide variety of trails, from urban walks through trendy neighborhoods to rural retreats by tranquil lakes—all within an hour's drive. This pocket guide contains nineteen easy day hikes in North Texas ranging in length from 0.75 mile to just over 6.0 miles. These hikes cover a variety of ecosystems, from the wide-open spaces of the blackland prairie to the wooded glens of the Cross Timbers. Area elevations generally range from 450 to 600 feet. A few places, like Cedar Ridge Preserve southwest of Dallas, have similar geological roots to the Texas Hill Country in and around Austin, with rocky limestone ledges and scrubby cedar forests.

Both Dallas and Fort Worth are nestled on the banks of the Trinity River, and while the river has been little more than a drainage ditch in some areas, cities are investing millions of dollars in projects to enhance their waterfronts and protect the region's vibrant floodplains—home to the nation's largest urban hardwood forest. The region's numerous lakes, all man-made and created to supply the area's ever-growing water demands, also provide sites for gorgeous hiking trails.

Although the Metroplex is more famous for its massive malls and sports arenas, the region is actually home to several top-notch nature preserves that offer a much-needed escape from suburban sprawl. Indeed it's possible to find secluded trails nestled along bubbling streams only a few hundred yards from bustling highways. *Best Easy Day Hikes Dallas/Fort Worth* showcases the best of this region's recreational riches.

Weather

An advantage North Texas offers over northern climes is year-round hiking weather. Sure summer days can be scorching, with temperatures routinely topping the 100-degree mark, but humidity typically drops and nighttime temperatures fall to the upper 70s, making for pleasant evening hikes. Winters here are generally mild, with daytime highs often topping 70 degrees, making for some of the best hiking months of the year. Another plus for fall hiking: Trails are largely deserted on weekends as folks take in another fall tradition—football. In winter, sudden cold fronts can move in, dipping temperatures below freezing, but snow is rare and fleeting. Winter also offers less-crowded trails and the ability to spot bird and squirrel nests in bare trees. Winter is the mating season for some species here, including coyotes, which are most commonly spotted at sunrise and sunset.

Spring brings rainy weather and fast-moving fronts that can trigger straight-line winds, tornadoes, and hail. Much of the Dallas/Fort Worth area is equipped with outdoor warning sirens that go off when dangerous tornados and large hail are approaching. If you find yourself on the trail when a storm pops up, head for cover if at all possible, and stay away from lone trees, lakes, and open areas.

The old North Texas saying “If you don’t like the weather, just wait five minutes and it’ll change” is a reminder to be prepared for any and all types of weather when heading out for a hike. Temperatures can drop 50 degrees or more in less than an hour, so check the weather report, and dress in layers when appropriate.

Wilderness Restrictions and Regulations

Trails in this guide are located in city parks, state parks, wildlife refuges, and lands managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Most trails located in city parks do not require special use permits or charge use fees. Texas state parks charge an admission fee, or you can purchase an annual pass that’s good for unlimited entry in the state’s more than ninety parks and covers everyone in the car or up to five people in your party if you enter via bike or foot. Passes are sold at most parks or can be ordered by calling (512) 389-8900.

Some trails are located in areas maintained by nonprofit groups such as the National Audubon Society and ask for donations in lieu of entrance fees. See trail descriptions for more information.

Safety and Preparation

Generally speaking, the most common wildlife encounters in North Texas are with squirrels, birds, and the occasional armadillo. Bobcats and coyotes also make their home here, but they present more danger to small pets than to people. North Texas is home to several varieties of poisonous snakes, including copperheads and rattlesnakes, and warning signs dot several trails, advising hikers to watch their step and not stray off the marked path. It’s also a good idea to hike in closed-toed shoes, not only to avoid stepping on a snake while you’re wearing sandals but also to avoid the wrath of fire ants and thorny plants, from cacti to horse nettle.

In tornado season, check the forecast before you head out and avoid hiking if there’s a thunderstorm or a tornado watch. After a heavy rain, the region’s heavy clay soils become muddy quagmires and bubbling streams turn into raging rivers, so consider trail conditions before heading out. Some dirt trails may be closed a day or two after a heavy rain. It’s smart to pack a light rain jacket in case a sudden shower comes up, and you’re likely to need a jacket fall through spring, when balmy days can quickly turn chilly after sundown.

While some trails have water fountains, many don’t, so pack one or two water bottles even for short hikes—more if you’re hiking with children and dogs. It’s also smart to wear sunscreen and a hat even on cloudy days. Long pants can save your legs from brambles and branches that grow over many trails. Mosquito repellent is recommended spring through fall, particularly when you’re hiking around sunrise and sunset, when the pests are most active.

Careful use of maps and this guide should keep you from getting lost, but if you do lose your way, stop and retrace your route until you can reorient yourself. Most of the

hikes in this book are well marked and frequently traveled, but it's wise to carry a GPS unit and bring a cell phone with you just in case of emergency. If possible, hike with a friend or join a local hiking group to combine fellowship and fun while hitting the trail.

Hiking Organizations

Cross Timbers Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club
1900 Highland Park Circle
Denton, TX 76205-6932
(940) 891-4984
<http://texas.sierraclub.org/crosstimbers/index.html>

Greater Fort Worth Sierra Club
P.O. Box 1874
Burleson, TX 76097
(817) 588-1167
www.lonestar.sierraclub.org/fortworth/

Dallas Sierra Club
P.O. Box 800365
Dallas, TX 75380
(214) 369-5543
www.texas.sierraclub.org/dallas

Dallas Trekkers
P.O. Box 743813
Dallas, TX 75374-3813
(214) 732-3419
www.dallastrekkers.org

Zero Impact

Many trails in the Dallas/Fort Worth region are heavily used year-round. We, as trail users and advocates, must be especially vigilant to make sure our passage leaves no lasting mark. Here are some basic guidelines for preserving trails in the region:

- Pack out all your own trash, including biodegradable items like orange peels. You might also pack out garbage left by less-considerate hikers.
- Don't approach or feed any wild creatures—the ground squirrel eyeing your

snack food is best able to survive if it remains self-reliant.

- Don't pick wildflowers or gather rocks, antlers, feathers, and other treasures along the trail. Removing these items will only take away from the next hiker's experience.
- Avoid damaging trailside soils and plants by remaining on the established route. This is also a good rule of thumb for avoiding poison oak and stinging nettle, common regional trailside irritants.
- Don't cut switchbacks, which can promote erosion.
- Be courteous by not making loud noises while hiking.
- Many of these trails are multiuse, which means you'll share them with other hikers, trail runners, cyclists, mountain bikers, and equestrians. Familiarize yourself with the proper trail etiquette, yielding the trail when appropriate.
- Use restrooms or outhouses at trailheads or along the trail.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be simple and easy to use. Each hike is described with a map and summary information that delivers the trail's vital statistics, including distance and type of trail (loop, lollipop, or out and back), approximate hiking time, difficulty, trail surface, best season to hike the trail, other trail users, canine compatibility, fees and permits, park schedule, sources for additional maps, and trail contacts. If there's something else you need to know about the trail, we'll tell you that too. Directions to the trailhead are also provided, along with a general description of what you'll see along the way. A detailed route finder (Miles and Directions) sets forth mileages between significant landmarks along the trail.

Hike Selection

This guide describes trails that are accessible to every hiker, whether visiting from out of town or someone lucky enough to live in Dallas/Fort Worth. The hikes are no longer than 7.0 miles round-trip, and some are considerably shorter. They range in difficulty from flat excursions perfect for a family outing to more challenging treks up ridges and ravines. While these trails are among the best, keep in mind that nearby trails, often in the same park or preserve, may offer options better suited to your needs. I've sought to space hikes throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth area, so wherever your starting point, you'll find a great easy day hike nearby.

Difficulty Ratings

These are all easy hikes, but easy is a relative term. To aid in the selection of a hike that suits particular needs and abilities, each is rated easy, moderate, or more challenging. Bear in mind that even challenging routes can be made easy by hiking within your limits and taking rests when you need them.

Easy hikes are generally short and flat, taking no longer than an hour to complete.

Moderate hikes involve increased distance and relatively mild changes in elevation, and will take one to two hours to complete.

More challenging hikes feature some steep stretches, greater distances, and generally take longer than two hours to complete.

These are completely subjective ratings—what you think is easy is entirely dependent on your level of fitness and the adequacy of your gear (primarily shoes). If you are hiking with a group, you should select a hike with a rating that's appropriate for the least fit and prepared in your party.

Approximate hiking times are based on the assumption that on flat ground, most walkers average 2 miles per hour. Adjust that rate by the steepness of the terrain and your level of fitness (subtract time if you're an aerobic animal and add time if you're

hiking with kids), and you have a ballpark hiking duration. Be sure to add more time if you plan to picnic or take part in other activities like bird watching or photography.

Trail Finder

Best Hikes for River and Creek Lovers

3 Trinity River Audubon Center

6 Breckenridge Park

10 L. B. Houston Nature Trail

16 River Legacy Park Trail

Best Hikes for Lake Lovers

12 Lake Grapevine Horseshoe Trail

13 Walnut Grove Trail

17 North Shore Trail

18 Ray Roberts Lake State Park: Johnson Branch Trail

Best Hikes for Children

3 Trinity River Audubon Center

9 Heard Wildlife Sanctuary: Wood Duck Trail

14 Bob Jones Nature Center Trail

15 Colleyville Nature Center Trail

Best Hikes for Dogs

1 Katy Trail

11 Little Bear Creek Trail

12 Lake Grapevine Horseshoe Trail

16 River Legacy Park Trail

Best Hikes for Great Views

2 White Rock Lake Trail

5 Cedar Ridge Preserve: Cattail Pond Trail

8 Arbor Hills Loop

Best Hikes for Nature Lovers

3 Trinity River Audubon Center

4 Cedar Hill State Park: Talala Trail

7 Spring Creek Preserve Trail

13 Walnut Grove Trail

19 Fort Worth Nature Center

Map Legend

	Interstate Highway
	U.S. Highway
	State Highway
	Local Roads
	Unpaved Roads
	Featured Route
	Trail
	Railroad
	River/Creek
	Marsh/Swamp
	Lake/Pond
	Boardwalk
	Bridge
	Bench
	Parking
	Picnic Area
	Point of Interest/Structure
	Restroom
	Town
	Trailhead
	Viewpoint/Overlook
	Waterfall

1 Katy Trail

The former railroad right-of-way has gone from neighborhood eyesore to the place to see and be seen in uptown Dallas. It's the closest thing North Texas hiking has to a singles bar, as the city's buff and beautiful sweat out romance. Some couples have even married on the trail. But don't feel put off if you're not in the market. The trail welcomes all ages, as long as you don't try to wander into the adjacent private homes and apartment complexes.

Distance: 5.0 miles out and back

Approximate hiking time: 1.5 to 2 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Trail surface: Concrete with side trail made out of pedestrian-friendly soft surface

Best season: Mar through June; Oct through Dec

Other trail users: Runners, cyclists, in-line skaters, dog walkers

Canine compatibility: Leashed dogs permitted

Fees and permits: No fees or permits required

Schedule: Park open daily 5:00 a.m. to midnight

Maps: TOPO! Texas CD; Friends of the Katy Trail map

Trail contacts: The trail is operated by the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department but is largely maintained and improved by the very active Friends of the Katy Trail; (214) 303-1180; www.katytraildallas.org.

Special considerations: The biggest bummer about the Katy Trail is the lack of restrooms. There are a few portable toilets in Reverchon Park but nothing along the trail. And don't think you can slip into the woods—both sides of the trail are densely populated, and you could end up on someone's back patio. At Knox Street you can stop for a drink at one of the bistros or grab a latte at a coffee shop and use the facilities, otherwise—sweat it out.

Finding the trailhead: From downtown Dallas, take Woodhall Rogers Freeway north to the Pearl Street exit. Go north on Pearl to Maple Avenue and follow Maple Avenue to entrance of Reverchon Park at 3535 Maple Ave. From the park's parking lot, walk toward Turtle Creek. Exit at the stone bridge and veer right on the trail, passing playgrounds on the right. The trail winds up a hill by a stone pavilion to the Katy Trail. GPS: N32 48.078' / W96 48.625'

The Hike

Located on the old railbed of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas, or MKT, Railroad (nicknamed Katy for short), this trail was born in 1997 to preserve the narrow greenbelt and create an urban path traveling north from downtown Dallas to posh

Highland Park and beyond. The 12-foot-wide concrete path is supplemented by an 8-foot-wide soft-surface trail for pedestrians in many but not all areas.

One of the easiest places to access the trail is from Reverchon Park, where the Friends of the Katy Trail, a volunteer organization of more than 1,200 enthusiasts, raised more than \$1.5 million to construct an elaborate stone entrance. The trail actually begins 0.5 mile to the south. If time permits, you can take a right at the trailhead and hike the short distance to enjoy a view of downtown Dallas and the American Airlines Center.

From the Reverchon entrance, simply veer left and start heading north, walking between upscale apartment and office buildings on the right and leafy Turtle Creek on the left. The trail is a straight shot, with no street crossings up to Knox Street, the border of Highland Park. Mileage markers are embedded in the trail every 0.25 mile, beginning at the American Airlines Center. From the south the markers go up to 3.5 miles and then return to zero.

The trail is very well populated—crowded even on weekends and after work—making it feel relatively safe during those times. Dallas Police officers patrol the trail on bikes, and Friends of the Katy Trail can be spotted making the rounds on a golf cart. In 2008 the city added “911” markers every one-eighth mile along a 3.5-mile stretch of the trail. At the bottom of these markers, labeled KT-100 through KT-125, are numbers indicating the GPS coordinates to help determine your location in an emergency—the Katy Trail doesn’t have an official address.

The trail continues to grow, spreading north from Highland Park to Southern Methodist University, and should eventually connect to the Mockingbird DART Station and a trail heading east to White Rock Lake. The trail is great for people watching—both fellow hikers and cyclists on the trail and residents perched on patios overlooking the trail. (Some upscale developments now use the trail as an amenity to boost adjacent property prices.)

As you cross over Cedar Springs Road, take a look to your left toward Turtle Creek at the pinkish building styled like a sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance villa. That’s the luxurious Mansion on Turtle Creek hotel, where rock stars and other celebrities routinely hang their hats—and perhaps hit the trail.

Pass over Hall Street and Lemmon Avenue. Turn around at Knox Street, but be sure to go all the way to the intersection. Otherwise you might miss Christopher Janney’s soundscape titled *Parking in Color*, which creates what he calls “urban musical instruments” for passers-by.

