

A BGES Americana Field University Program:

Discover Alabama:

A Frontier History to Star Wars

With Mike Bunn and Norm Dasinger Jr.

January 8-15, 2022; from Mobile, Alabama

I love America and am constantly enlightened as I move through her diverse and interesting history. BGES created an Americana series to feed that natural wanderlust and enduring curiosity—we have done Route 66, we did Texas, and are doing Lewis and Clark and the state of Kentucky later this year. We have and will continue to do additional themes. Now our attention turns to the state of Alabama.

These tours are still history intensive but are not narrowly focused on any one aspect of the region's experience and are very attractive as family events. If you and your loved one or traveling buddy are looking for something for everyone, this tour is for you.

Our faculty comprises two of the most engaging men I know—both incurably interested in their communities and their collective heritage. Their knowledge, enthusiasm and social skills will make this an event that you will long remember and will inspire you to further research on the fringe elements of human events that you ought to know more about. I cannot imagine any person being bored at any time on this tour.

One of the greatest challenges for BGES history tours is thematic consistency and dealing with events in chronological order. We start our 2022 programming happily released from that burden; instead, we will have many mini-events, each the focus of our attention, and then set aside as we move on to another site and theme. Starting on the coast, we will travel north along the western and central parts of the state to the banks of the Tennessee River and then return through eastern Alabama back to the Gulf Coast.

—BGES Executive Director Len Riedel

Saturday, January 8, 2022

6:00 PM. Meet at your headquarters hotel to greet your fellow travelers and pick up your nametags and handouts. Mike and Norm will overview your program, answer questions you might have, and then break for you to have dinner on your own.

Hotel is included.

Sunday, January 9, 2022

8:00 AM. Our first destination is Fort Morgan, the dominate structure in the August 1864 drama that closed the last open port on the Gulf Coast late in the Civil War. This operation involved both the Union Navy and Army operating against a fort erected by the United States to defend the port of Mobile against invading foreign forces, yet it achieved its greatest fame defending itself against a combined sea and land attack by the United States.

After lunch we will work back along the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, soaking up decades of coastal life that depended upon seafood for its way of life, and then on to the sites of the last engagements of the Civil War. While Robert E. Lee was surrendering at Appomattox, Federal troops who had already taken Spanish Fort were now reducing Fort Blakeley, the last defenses of the city of Mobile. A tour of the ghost town of Blakeley and the battlefield area is a special treat because Mike Bunn is the park director, and he has done remarkable things to improve the interpretative experience.

We will return to our headquarters hotel by 5 PM. The hotel, breakfast, and lunch are included, but dinner is on your own.

Monday January 10, 2022

8:00 AM. Mobile is one of the great cities of the South. Because of the fortunes of war, this city was spared the destruction that visited other metropolitan areas that were in the path of the contending armies. An old city, where Mardi Gras originated (sorry New Orleans), architecture and antebellum homes paint the landscape. Because it was a port, it has military outposts and grand hotels. We will start today with a driving tour and an on-board narrative with a jump-off photo op at a gorgeous city plantation, Oakleigh.

We have miles to go before we sleep, and our destination today is Selma via Montgomery. The state capital is about 160 miles north, and we will depart Mobile around 9:30 and will have lunch when we get there. With much to see there, we will drive around this old city with photo ops at the Capitol, the First Confederate White House, Martin Luther King's Dexter Avenue Church, the Lynching Museum and memorial, Rosa Park's Home and the great bus boycott, and MLK's home, which suffered terrorism and fire bombing. We will also visit Oaklawn Cemetery where Governors George and Lurleen Wallace are buried—we will discuss the stories

surrounding them in detail later in the tour. For country western fans, we will also visit the grave of Hank Williams Jr.

On a trip of this span, just like Route 66, you must focus on the experience. It just isn't possible to stop at and interpret every site, so we will pick a few spots each day to put some boots on the ground. Today's feature is Fort Toulouse/Jackson. Based in Wetumpka, this early 18th-century (1717) fortification was built by the French to counter the influence of the British in the Georgia and Carolina colony. Initially garrisoned by 20 to 30 French soldiers, they ingratiated themselves with the Creek tribes, with one officer marrying one of the Native American women. Today Fort Toulouse is a living history site with an authentic reproduction of the fort and plans to reconstruct the later Fort Jackson. The site drips with both early American and even prehistoric native American history, which you will be immersed in during the trip. We will then push on to our Selma hotel, which is included.

Lunch will be provided, but dinner is on your own.

Tuesday January 11, 2022

8:00 AM. Another big day as we start with a drive about one of America's most consequential cities. Selma is one of the great Civil Rights cities, and it also has a dramatic role in the end of the Civil War with a battle a week before the final acts in Virginia and near Mobile. Our driving tour around Selma includes the site of the Selma arsenal, the remaining earthworks of the battle of Selma, a magnificent cemetery, and the Edmund Pettus Bridge, site of "Bloody Sunday"—perhaps the "Old North Bridge" of the Civil Rights movement.

Once we finish with Selma, we will head over to stretch our legs at the Old Cahawba Archaeological Park. This ghost town was the site of the first capital of the state in 1819, and it held that responsibility until 1826. The town continued to grow in prosperity until about 1870. Newly emancipated slaves saw the community as an opportunity for prosperity, but within five years, the town had shrunk to less than 300 residents, and by 1900, the town was deserted. Today, the area is pocked with structures of the period, including the layout of the old streets.

As the morning winds down, we will drive over to Marion (named after the famous South Carolina partisan fighter—Francis Marion, The Swamp Fox), where Sam Houston married. This is one of the most important Civil Rights cities you know little to nothing about. Following lunch, we will drive around Marion and be regaled with stories of this pretty little city. Did you know Martin Luther King's wife, Coretta, was born here? Do you know about Jimmy Wilson and Estelle Barker? Have you heard the story of Jimmie Lee Jackson? These are realities that sear the soul. This town has more National Register sites than many much larger cities. Want an early insight? Watch the movie *Selma*.

Our day is not yet done as we have a last stop at Moundville Archaeological Park, where we will spend nearly two hours looking around. If you do not understand the prehistoric Native American culture, this stop will give you a wonderful grounding. With nearly 30 Indian Mounds from the Mississippian period (1000 to 1450 AD), this nearly 200-acre campus will give you a Big Picture perspective of America before it was America.

We will overnight in Tuscaloosa. Hotel, breakfast, and lunch are included; however, dinner is on your own.

Wednesday January 12, 2022

8:00 AM. In Alabama, football is king, and there is Auburn and Alabama Roll Tide! Yet again, we will face the paradox of history and the emerging society during the period of Civil Rights now nearly 60 years ago. Our windscreen tour will provide several photo ops as we drive through the campus. Many of you will remember Gov. George Wallace amid the Civil War Centennial, standing in the doorway defying the Kennedy Administration as the University of Alabama refused to admit Black students. The photograph shown here is iconic, and we will discuss that milestone in the Civil Rights movement. It seems almost trivial, if you are not a native Alabamian, but we will also drive by the Paul “Bear” Bryant Museum—*“in the beginning was the word and the word was made flesh and the flesh was embodied in the person of ‘The Bear.’”* Perhaps the most influential football coach of all times, Bear is a legend portrayed in movies like *The Junction Boys* and *Forrest Gump* (the late Winston Groom of the BGES was a UA grad, and he wrote the definitive history of Alabama football).

We will leave the campus and drive to one of the most famous restaurants in Alabama, Archibald’s, for lunch. Since 1962, Archibald Woodrow has dominated the BBQ scene in the state (although Big Bob Gibson contests that—you will get a chance to compare). Norm is a certified Kansas City BBQ Society Competition judge, and he will share with you the elements of award-winning BBQ.

The afternoon takes us to the Steel capital of the South, Birmingham, where our drive-through includes more photo ops of plantations like Arlington, Blast Furnaces like Sloss—which has a haunted house—and Vulcan Materials, which is the nation’s largest producer of aggregate construction materials like crushed stone, asphalt, and concrete. This singular site shows the long-standing importance of the region across the history of the United States. It is a giant industrial mecca.

Birmingham was the home of a famous Negro League baseball team, Birmingham Barons, and features the oldest professional baseball stadium in America: Rickwood Field, built in 1910. The Barons played there; we will drive past. We will also relive the horror of the Klan terror, driving past the infamous 16th Street Baptist Church, where four young girls were killed in a dynamite bombing on September 15, 1963. This was a turning point in the Civil Rights movement in the United States—now a

National Park Service site. The four perpetrators were known. One was convicted 14 years after the act, another died without being charged, and the other two were finally prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison in 2001/2002.

Our day finishes as we move to Hog Mountain and describe the 1863 Streight's Mule Raid. Here at Hog Mountain, Nathan Bedford Forrest engaged the harassed Streight. We will walk the battlefield before heading to Huntsville for our overnight.

Hotel, breakfast, and lunch are included. Dinner is on your own.

Thursday January 13, 2022

8:00 AM. In the wake of the Second World War, Huntsville became exceptionally important to the United States as the epicenter of our emerging and competitive interest in space operations. Seeded by the brilliant physicists of the Nazi German regime like Wernher von Braun, American research catapulted us into a space race with the Soviet Union. Over the ensuing decades, Huntsville has established itself as one of the leading centers of technology and space exploitation in the world. We could spend several days here, but will limit ourselves to several hours—most likely whetting your appetite to make a separate trip back at some future time. Our windscreen tour will present several photo ops across a range of themes: Constitution Hall is an open-air living history that depicts life in 1819; closed since the pandemic, we can still see the structures that compose the experience if we cannot interact with the living historians.

In 1819, Alabama achieved statehood, and a stately home was built in Huntsville, and in 1845 was acquired by Dr. William Weedon. The history of this home is worthy of interpretation, and you will hear all about it. Today, it is a museum, but it is one of the great homes of Alabama. We will then roll past the home of Leroy Pope, "Poplar Grove Plantation," built in 1814, the first brick home in the community. Pope hosted Andrew Jackson here after his defeat of the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.

Do you know why Dred Scott and Huntsville are connected?

From Huntsville, we head to the banks of the Tennessee River at Decatur. A wonderful antebellum city with a Civil War history; but first will do a driving tour of Mooresville, the first incorporated town in Alabama and where the entire town is on the National Register of Historic Places. The post office is the oldest continuously operating in the state. We will also visit Belle Mina, another of Alabama's old towns, and a place where the state's second governor used forced labor to build his plantation and a rail station to serve Mooresville. Populated by perhaps 50 people, it is representative of scores of small unincorporated and practically moribund settlements. Recently, the opening of an auto plant has provided a lifeline of jobs to the region. Our hour-long tour of Civil War Decatur is a prelude to lunch.

OK, you had Archibald's. Now have the best! That is what fans of Big Bob Gibson's BBQ will tell you. You will get to make up your mind between yesterday and today as we have lunch at BBGs. Any one area of the country will ever concede that their 'cue is not the best in the country—but in the Alabama wars, the lines are clearly drawn.

After lunch, we will head to the spot where Andrew Jackson conclusively ended the Creek Indian War in 1814. Horseshoe Bend National Battlefield Park tells the story of pacification of the native tribes in Alabama. This is a spot you wouldn't go to unless you were going there, and yet it is a prelude to Jackson's controversial presidential decision to remove the eastern Indians to reservations in what today is Oklahoma and which we know as the Trail of Tears. Horseshoe Bend is where history happened.

We then head to our overnight in Auburn. Hotel, breakfast, and lunch are included with dinner on your own.

Friday January 14, 2022

8:00 AM. Norm Dasinger will tell you that Auburn is the true "University" of Alabama, and that War Eagles soar over Elephants (the mascot of the University of Alabama). We will start the morning with a driving tour of that pretty campus and maybe share a few war stories before driving to one of America's most important and controversial sites—Tuskegee. Of course, we will tell the story of the famous "Red Tails," the Black pilots who established such a great legacy in World War II. Here is where they trained. We will then tour the historically Black and significant Tuskegee Institute. Controversy swirls around the area, as it was revealed that the Federal government conducted syphilis experiments on unsuspecting Black men, causing much harm to the community. There is a reason that the Black community doesn't trust the CDC. Nonetheless, Tuskegee matters.

Departing the Tuskegee campus, we head to Fort Deposit, a staging area for supplies during the Creek Indian War in 1813 and 1814. It later has a relevance to the Civil Rights era in which Episcopal minister Jonathan Daniels was killed in Haynesville after trying to buy refreshments for some 30 Civil Rights activists. They had been arrested after picketing white-only stores in Fort Deposit in brutally humid, 100-degree temperatures. Daniels was a 1961 Virginia Military Institute graduate—first in his class. Today, the arch in the third barracks at VMI is named Daniel's Arch.

We continue, returning to Mobile but stopping first for lunch at Priester Pecans. Sample freely; the wonderful country store is all things pecan (pronounced "Pa-conn" not "Pee-can," which is something you use to go to the bathroom). Pecan pie is a southern original.

After lunch, we will stop off in Monroeville and spend 45 minutes in their wonderful courthouse museum. This small town is the literary center of Alabama—hometown

of famous authors Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*). The fictional town in Lee's iconic novel is based on Monroeville. The courthouse is the scene of the trial. Then we are off to our final stop of the day: Fort Mims, the scene of a Creek Indian War massacre in 1813. The deaths of nearly 500 militia and civilians by the Red Sticks inflamed the region and intensified the conflict. We will return to our headquarters hotel in Mobile.

The hotel and breakfast are included, but lunch and dinner are on your own.

Saturday January 15, 2022

9:00 AM. What a week it has been! Can you even begin to sort it all out? Well, that is what pictures and introspection are all about. You will have experienced the magnificence and breath of the American experience. Much uplifting and much dark—have we, as a society, learned anything? Have you learned anything?

Our last stop is the paradox of the American experience. We will tour the mighty battleship USS *Alabama*, now part of the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park. As the largest platforms of firepower in World War II, battleships were named after states: *Wisconsin, Arizona, California, Utah, Nevada, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, New York*—you get the point. The USS *Alabama* had 129 guns and was designed for heavy shore bombardment. She served along the Murmansk run to Russia and later went to the Pacific, taking part in the operations against Saipan, Truk, Palau, Yap, Guam, the Philippines, Leyte Gulf, and Okinawa. She led the U.S. fleet into Tokyo Harbor.

There are other superb military static displays in the park such as the WW II submarine USS *Drum*, and your three hours here is hardly enough. We will leave and have lunch at the Blue Gill, looking out over the serene waters where so much conflict was enjoined and where now peace reigns. In surveying this week for you, it's a reminder that the price of freedom is not free and that this state tells a fabulous American story that is instructive—a very worthy lesson to start a new year.

About the Faculty:

Mike Bunn is a rising star in the historical community. The Director of Historic Fort Blakeley State Park, Mike is the author of a new Alabama history textbook that will be used within the state—tentatively entitled *Alabama Journey*, it will be used throughout the state in coming years. He is also the author or coauthor of six other books: *Fourteenth Colony, The Forgotten Story of the Gulf South during the America's Revolutionary Era; Early Alabama, An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years 1798-1826; The Battle for the Southern Frontier, The Creek War and the War of 1812; Civil War Eufala; Assault on Fort Blakely, The Thunder and Lighting of Battle; and Well Worth Stopping to See, Antebellum Columbus Georgia through the Eyes of Travelers.*

Norman Dasinger, Jr., is a business owner in Alabama who is a true force of nature in the preservation community. A man whose historical roots go back to the American Revolution, he is a member of ancestral and heritage groups that honor his relations both North and South and going back to the American Revolution. He is a self-taught historian who is as comfortable leading a tour of Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Selma and then pivoting on a dime to discuss the Great Montgomery Bus Boycott of the Civil Rights era. He knows the history of monuments and countless Civil War stories that are regularly featured in BGES's Blue and Gray Dispatch series, which he edited for a time. A major force in the preservation of the Georgia Hell Hole region (New Hope Church, Dallas, and Pickett's Mill), he is an excellent tour leader across a wide range of fronts. This tandem team will be a singular treat that will entertain and inform from start to finish!

Hotel Information:

This program will be based in either Mobile or Spanish Fort. We will announce it soon. Your registration fee includes 7 nights single or double occupancy.

Transportation:

The servicing airport is Mobile (MOB), with Pensacola Regional (PNS) an hour east and Gulfport (GPT) about an hour or so west. Pensacola has the advantage of being served by Southwest Airlines. All roads end at Mobile, with I-10 and I-65 converging there.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided with handouts as appropriate and needed by the tour leaders. This program is so diverse that it is not practical to present a recommended list. As you peruse the itinerary, see the literature that might support it. For example, start with Winston Groom's *The Crimson Tide*; Harper Lee's [*To Kill a Mockingbird*](#); Truman Capote's [*In Cold Blood*](#); Jack Friend's [*West Wind, Flood Tide: The Battle of Mobile Bay*](#); Art Bergeron's [*Confederate Mobile*](#), and so on. Civil Rights literature ...

Registration Form

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Presented by Mike Bunn and Norman Dasinger

January 8-15, 2022; from Mobile, Alabama

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes 7 nights single or double occupancy hotel, 7 breakfasts provided at hotel and 6 lunches, handouts with maps, the academic program, support of two professional historians, tour director, and transportation. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$2,450 single occupancy or \$2,000 per person double

_____ Current BGES member, \$2,300 single and \$1,850 per person double

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$500 per person. Total enclosed is \$_____. I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit cards to 434-432-0596 . You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.