



ECOS

**Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Rockdale County**

**Focus Area: SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE**

**Gateway: Monastery of the Holy Spirit**

**Welcome Facility: Susong homestead**

Residents and visitors often claim, and even sense that the alignment of Arabia and Panola Mountains has a powerful spiritual energy. There's something mysterious and awe-inspiring about being near huge expanses of exposed rock and the fragile ecosystems that have survived there for hundreds of millions of years. The unusual plants that thrive in sparse vernal pools in the granite are a source of wonder and mystery. For many people, nature itself is a temple for worship.

By using the Monastery of the Holy Spirit as a Gateway, natural and spiritual connections can be made. Founded in 1944, the 2,000-plus acre property is the largest greenspace in Rockdale County. The Monastery grounds can provide fascinating educational opportunities including a nature center, a nature trail with points of interest and other outdoor exhibits that highlight the lovely landscape.

The Monastery's role in fostering the agrarian economy in the Heritage Area can also be showcased. As good stewards of the land for over 60 years, the monks have uncovered a vast collection of important Native American artifacts while plowing the landscape. Some of the pottery shards and arrowheads date back 10,000 years. Because of their dedication to preserving wetlands and riparian habitats, the monks have placed conservation easements on their wetlands, documented 88 varieties of butterflies and 48 species of dragonflies in addition to numerous song birds native to the Monastery.

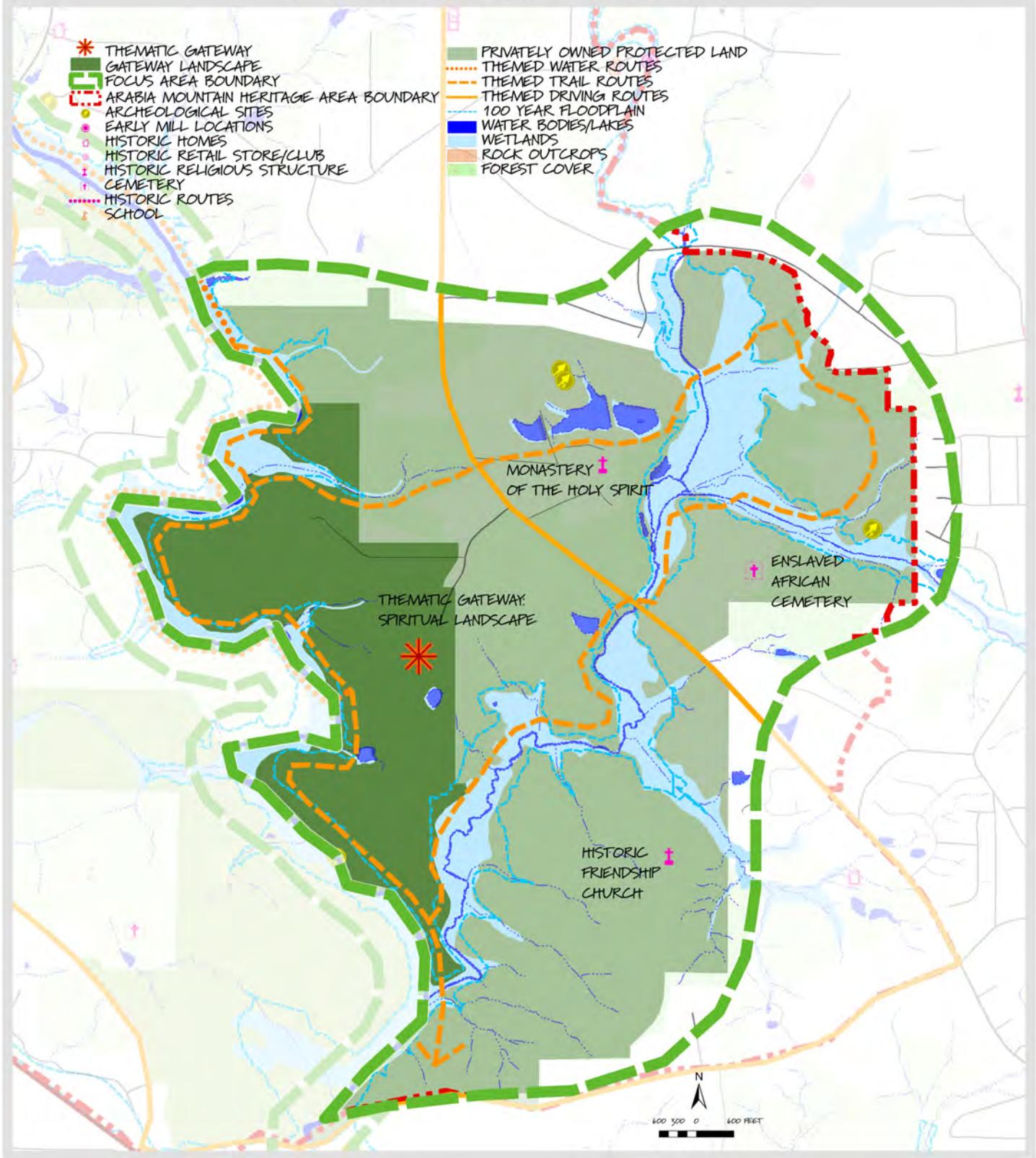
Two outstanding exhibits that can be offered here can feature Native American culture as well as the diversity of butterflies, dragonflies and moths and other wildlife. The original granite Susong home can serve as an attractive nature center with meeting spaces, exhibits, information desk and restroom and dining facilities. The planned driving, walking and water Route System includes connections to this Gateway. Interpretive trails and guided walking and canoe tours can direct visitors to exhibits, outdoor gathering spaces and classrooms, wildlife habitats and other natural landmarks. In addition, horse trails can be offered, and possibly connect to active, private horse farms nearby.

Outdoor exhibits at the Spiritual Landscape Gateway can feature nature's abundance including beaver dams, wetlands, native trees and sustainable timber harvesting. Archeology and history exhibits can be offered in renovated brick and granite barns. Trails can also lead visitors to remnants of the historic Friendship Church, old slave cemeteries and archeological sites.

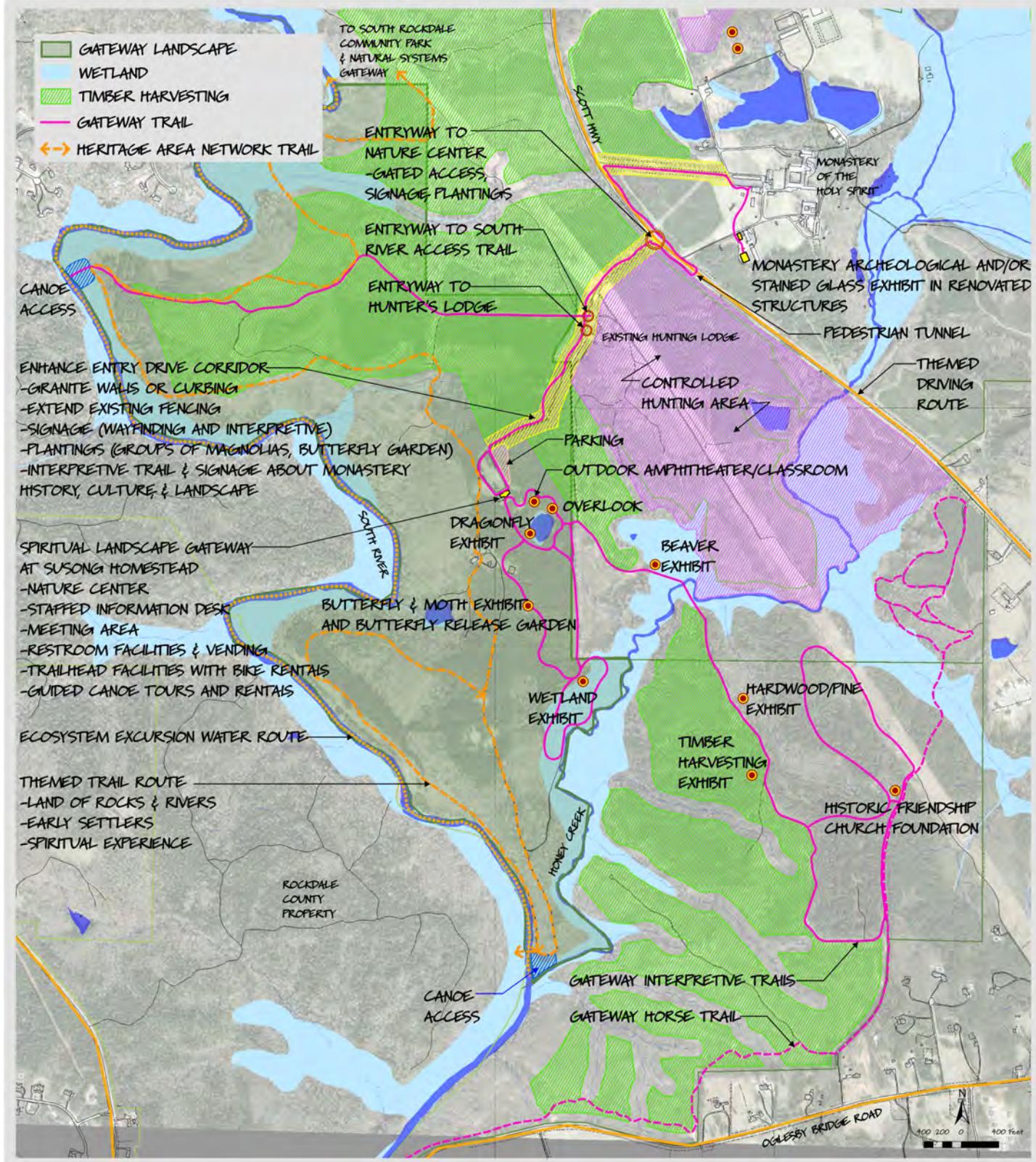
Sites to be highlighted:

- Panola and Arabia mountains
- Monastery of the Holy Spirit
- Historic homes, churches, slave cemeteries and Native American archeological sites.

## SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE FOCUS AREA



## SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE GATEWAY at MONASTERY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



## **4.2 HERITAGE AREA ROUTE SYSTEM**

By featuring special places, nature trails and historic sites, themes bring the history and culture of a place to life.

While Focus Areas and Gateways described earlier provide much needed exhibits on the Heritage Area's significance, the community requested a cohesive way to connect them. Driving, walking and canoeing routes provide that connection and a full menu of choices. By creating a distinct and varying Route System for interpretation, visitors will gain a deeper appreciation of all that the Heritage Area can offer them.

The Plan recommends this three-prong Route System for education and recreation. Comprised of driving, walking (hard and soft surface trails and sidewalks) and water routes, the conceptual layout was based on proximity to venues and their relation to the Heritage Area's greenspace and environmental features, existing historic resources and community preferences.

The walking route coordinates with the Georgia Department of Natural Resource's plans for both Panola Mountain State Park and Vaughters' Farm, as well as the ongoing completion of the multi-use trail system by PATH Foundation. By the end of 2005, eight miles of paved trails are complete within the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area.

Each route features at least two types of mobility. Based on findings from the Feasibility Study, as well as input from the community planning process, the following themed routes are recommended.

## HERITAGE AREA ROUTE SYSTEM

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES

**'LAND OF ROCKS & RIVERS'**

—(TRAIL)  
—(DRIVING)

**'STONE CUTTERS'**

—(TRAIL)  
—(DRIVING)

**'EARLY SETTLERS'**

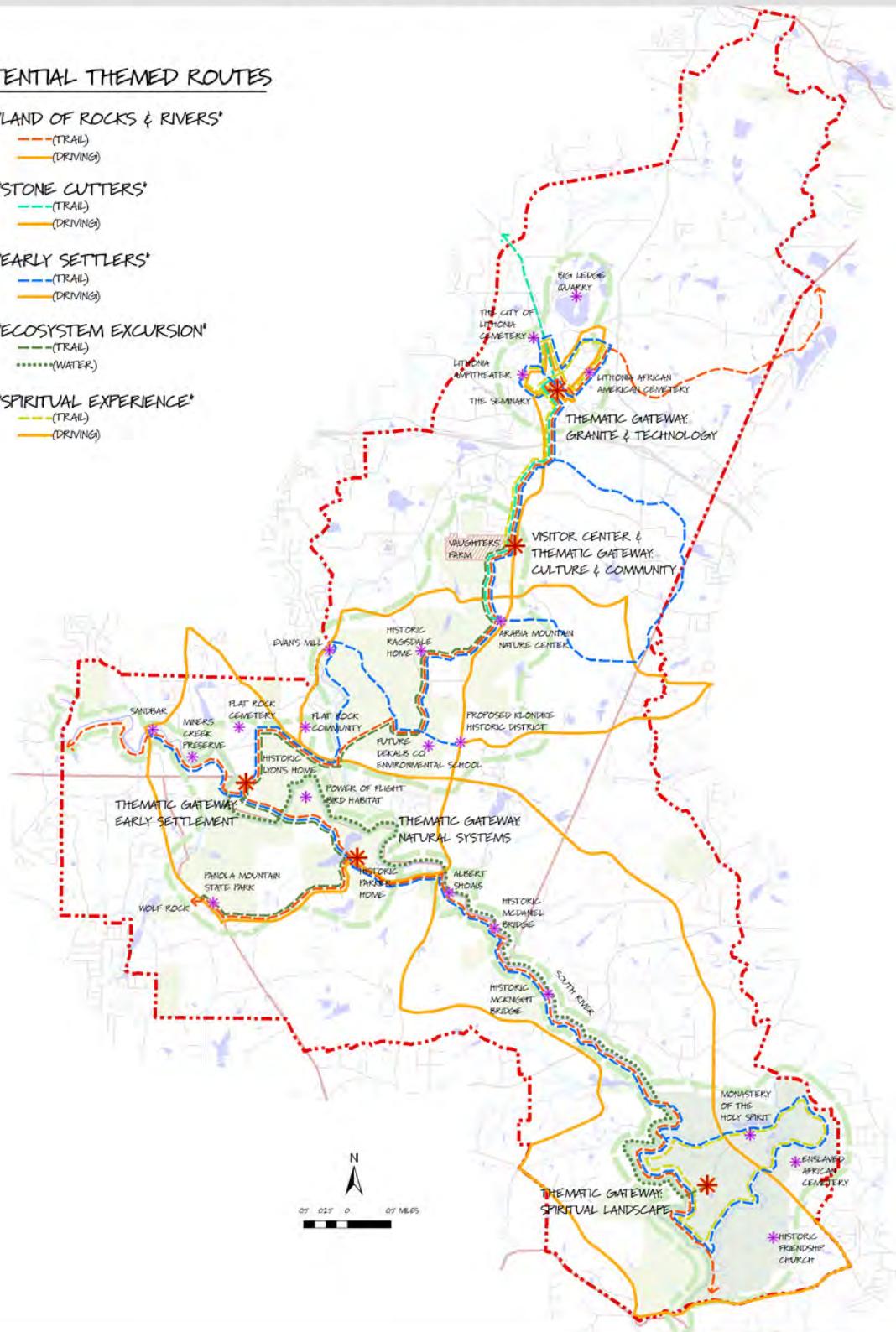
—(TRAIL)  
—(DRIVING)

**'ECOSYSTEM EXCURSION'**

—(TRAIL)  
—(WATER)

**'SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE'**

—(TRAIL)  
—(DRIVING)





Arabia Alliance

Remains of an early homestead



Arabia Alliance

Granite outcrops at Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve



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Klondike Historic District cemetery

### Themed Route #1: Land of Rocks and Rivers Primary modes: Driving and walking

This route defines complex relationships between people and the land. The Heritage Area's granite mountains and major waterways had a profound influence on the people and their trades. The Land of Rocks and Rivers theme becomes the backbone for the entire Route System, stretching north to south connecting the Yellow River and the City of Lithonia to the South River and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. The Route connects all five Gateways. Key venues along this walking and driving route include the Lithonia African-American cemetery, the Lithonia Woman's Club, Vaughters' Farm, Davidson-Aribia Mountain Nature Preserve, the historic Ragsdale home, Flat Rock cemetery, the Lyon's property, Miners Creek Preserve, Panola Mountain State Park, the historic Parker homestead, McDaniel and McKnight bridge sites and the Susong homestead.

## THEMED ROUTE - 'LAND OF ROCKS & RIVERS'

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES

'LAND OF ROCKS & RIVERS'

— (TRAIL)  
— (DRIVING)



Fred Miles/ko



Pools in the granite outcrops of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve

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African-American cemetery in the City of Lithonia

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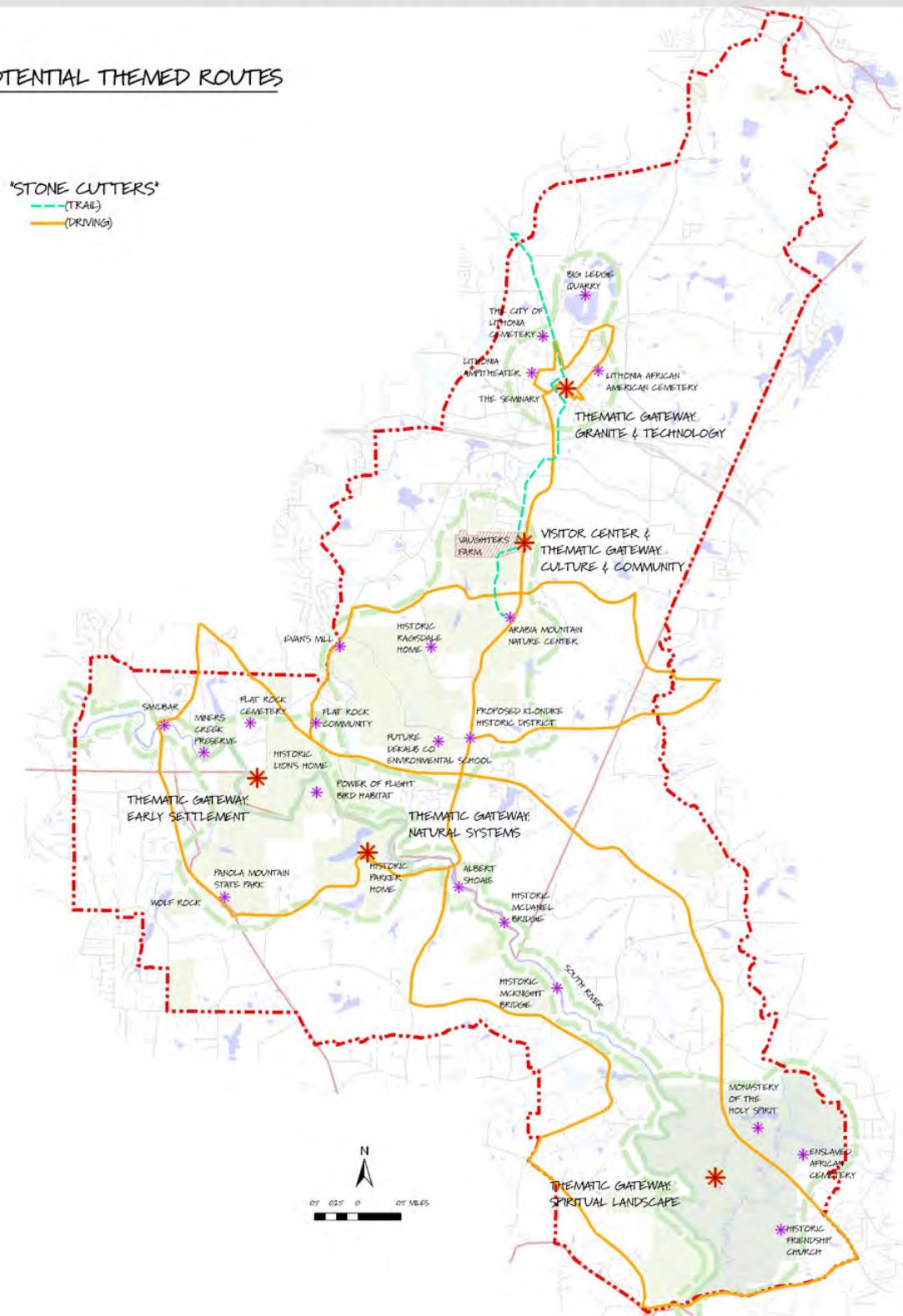
Remains of Bruce Street School in the City of Lithonia

### Themed Route #2: Stone Cutters Primary modes: Driving and walking

This route showcases the dynamic history of the granite industry and its local, regional and national impacts. Lithonia granite is valued for its density, color, durability and rarity. Coupled with an expanding railroad system, granite quarrying boosted the City of Lithonia culturally and economically. Lithonia granite was sought after for public works projects around the nation. The route will showcase the significance of the granite industry and tell the story of the contributions made by European immigrant craftsmen and African-American stone cutters. Important venues along the trails and driving routes include former quarries, granite architecture, the City of Lithonia and historic cemeteries.

## THEMED ROUTE - 'STONE CUTTERS'

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES



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**South River**

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**Klondike Historic District**

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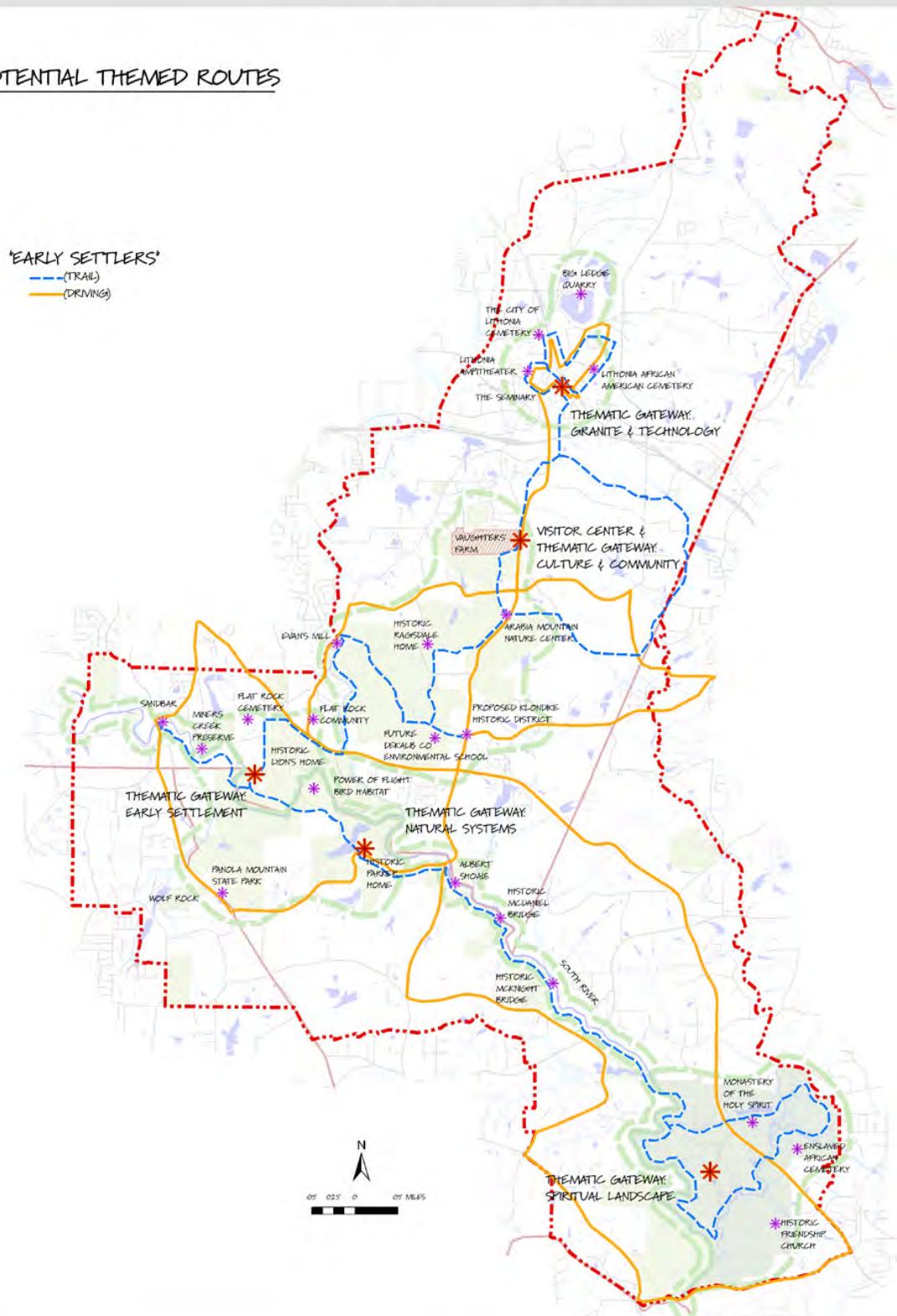
**Lyon's homestead along the South River in DeKalb County**

**Theme Route #3: Early Settlers**  
**Primary modes: Driving and walking**

This route introduces visitors to the cultural diversity, traditions and values of the Heritage Area's first inhabitants. The driving and walking routes trace the imprint of generations by highlighting historic communities, sites and architecture. The route begins in the City of Lithonia, encompasses historic homesteads such as Ragsdale, Lyon, Parker and Housworth and explores the historic communities of Flat Rock and Klondike, ending at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit which was farm land for generations before the monks arrived. Interpretive venues include Native American archeological sites, historic homes and early mill sites and farms.

## THEMED ROUTE - 'EARLY SETTLERS'

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES



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Alexander Lake

Fred Mikashko



Davidson-Arabsia Mountain Nature Preserve

Fred Mikashko



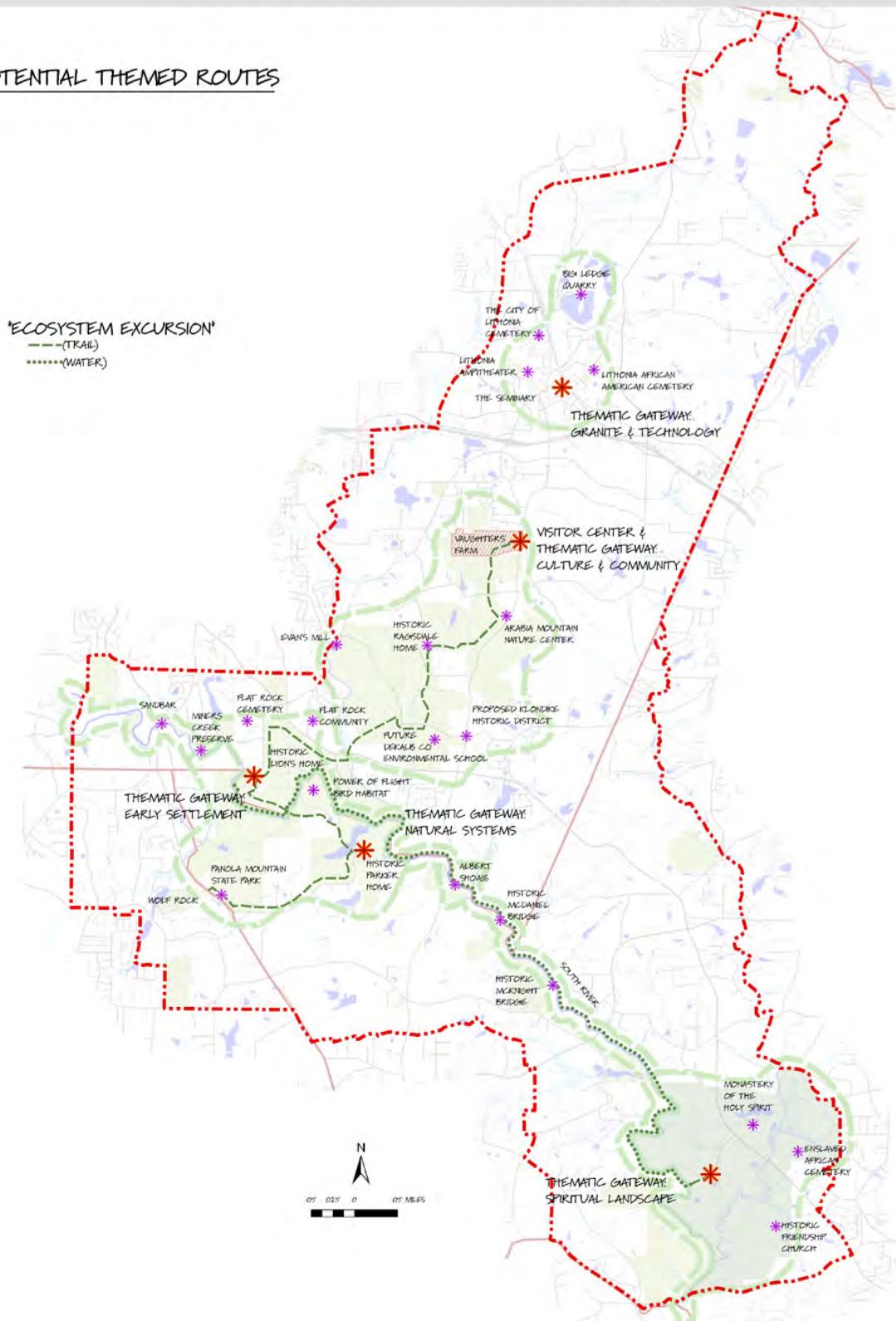
Prickly Pear found in the Heritage Area

#### Theme Route #4: Ecosystem Excursion Primary modes: Walking and canoeing

This route uses walking trails and rivers to explore the Heritage Area's breath-taking granite, river and forest ecosystems. Granite outcrops, fields, forests, wetlands and waterways are home to a diverse selection of trees, shrubs, mosses, lichens and flowers, as well as abundant wildlife. Many plants are endemic to granite outcrops and vernal pools, and found few places on earth besides Arabia and Panola Mountains. Rock formations in and along the rivers create beautiful visual interest and provide important environmental benefits. The trail and water routes allow visitors to experience these ecosystems up close which will encourage environmental stewardship in future generations. Facilities such as the Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort (AWARE) and nature centers at Arabia and Panola Mountains will play a significant role in interpreting the Ecosystem Excursion theme. Other venues of significance are the South River, Albert Shoals and DeKalb County's future environmental high school. This groundbreaking project, which could become a role model around the country, will be located next to Murphey-Candler Elementary School at Klondike and Browns Mill roads, to minimize land disturbance. The actual building, as well as the curriculum, will actively engage students in environmental studies with an emphasis on connections to natural treasures found in the Heritage Area. The site is adjacent to greenspace at Davidson-Arabsia Mountain Nature Preserve and is connected to the PATH trail, offering countless opportunities for students, faculty and the public to experience nature's lessons first hand.

## THEMED ROUTE - 'ECOSYSTEM EXCURSION'

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES





**Summit view on top of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve**



**Church in the Klondike Historic District**



**Christ Emmanuel Church in the Flat Rock Community**

### **Theme Route #5: Spiritual Experience**

**Primary modes:** Driving and walking

This Route celebrates the religious history and spirituality of the land. Native Americans flourished here as far back as 10,000 years ago, leaving artifacts and mysteries about their culture. The importance of religion is evident at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, heir to a 1,000-year-old tradition. Though we have all heard of monasteries, very few people have actually been to one. Visitors to the property experience a tranquil sense of calm and well being. Spiritual retreats, monastic vocation training and daily prayers for the public are offered.

Of course, the landscape itself suggests there's something supernatural. Visitors often find spiritual meaning in the peacefulness and permanence these unusual granite landscapes exude. Sunrises and sunsets, rushing waters, the complex patterns in miniature flowers, the rustling of wildlife, and light glistening across vernal pools all bring us closer to the beauty and spirituality in nature.

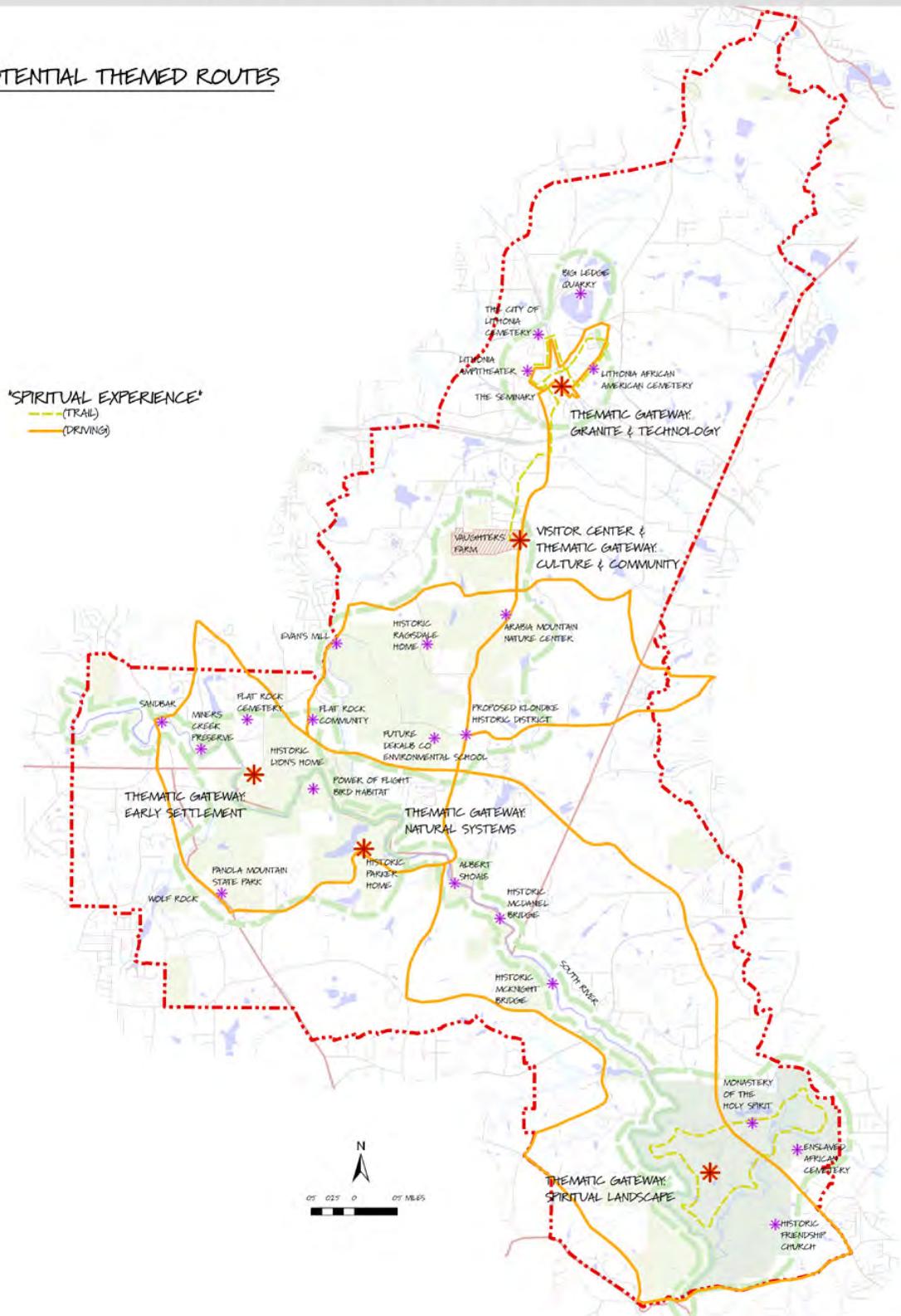
Interpretive venues in addition to the Monastery include Native American sites, historic granite churches and cemeteries, Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve and Panola Mountain State Park.

#### **4.3 VENUE CONNECTIVITY**

Organizing and presenting the Heritage Area's multifaceted features, in ways that are understandable and meaningful, will be achieved through this integrated system of Focus Areas, Gateways and Routes.

## THEMED ROUTE - 'SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE'

### POTENTIAL THEMED ROUTES



VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
<b>CULTURE AND COMMUNITY FOCUS AREA</b>						
Visitor Center & Gateway: Vaughters' Farm	Last working farm in DeKalb County, Pictorial Landscape	●	●	●	●	●
Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve	Granite monadnock, unique ecosystems	●	●		●	●
Ragsdale Home	1890 structure			●		
Klondike Historic District and Community	Crossroads of Klondike & South Goddard Rd., former center of commerce with structures dating back to 1840			●		
Future DeKalb County Environmental School	Environmentally responsive campus with ecologically focused curriculum				●	
Evans Mill	Remnants of historic mill & cascading rock shoals			●		
<b>GRANITE AND TECHNOLOGY FOCUS AREA</b>						
Gateway: City of Lithonia	Community established around the railroad & supported a thriving Granite Industry	●	●	●		●
Lithonia Woman's Club	1929 Granite Clubhouse		●	●		

VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
GRANITE AND TECHNOLOGY FOCUS AREA (CONTINUED)						
The Seminary	National Register of Historic Places, 1895, former school, boarding house, & private residence		●	●		
Lithonia Amphitheatre and Park	Granite structure part of the historic Lithonia Park, 1940s to early 1950s		●			
The City of Lithonia Cemetery	1850s – Present, most gravestones date 1960s – 1920s			●		●
Lithonia African American Cemetery	1850s - Present			●		●
Railroad & Spur Tracks	Lithonia began & grew up around, vital to Lithonia Granite Industry	●		●		
Big Ledge Quarry	Active Quarry since 1890s		●			
Bruce Street Community	African American Community established by 1895, includes historic Union Church & granite ruins of 1938-1960s Bruce Street School		●	●		●
Proposed Lithonia Historic District	239 contributing structures/sites, 1830s Cross Roads community formed, 1856 Cross Roads incorporated as City of Lithonia	●	●	●		●

VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
EARLY SETTLEMENT FOCUS AREA						
Gateway: South River & Flat Rock	Flat Rock is one of the first African-American settlements in the area & the South River has hosted early settlers dating back 12,000 yrs with early nomadic people	●		●	●	●
Sandbars	Part of South River Ecosystem	●			●	
Miners Creek Preserve	Native American archeological site from 5,000 years ago to proto-historic time			●		
Flat Rock Cemetery	Oldest known African-American cemetery in DeKalb County 1820-1956, New cemetery 1960-present			●		●
Lyon's Home and Farm	Oldest home in DeKalb County, 1822-23			●		
Albert Shoals	Rock formation in South River, falls 25 ft in distance of 300 ft	●			●	
McDaniel Bridge	Remnants remain of granite abutments			●		
McKnight Bridge	Former bridge & mill			●		
Everett Property	Contains cultural, historic, and environmental resources			●	●	

VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
EARLY SETTLEMENT FOCUS AREA (CONTINUED)						
DeCastro Nature Preserve	100 acre preserve with pedestrian suspension bridge			●	●	
South Rockdale Community Park	176 acres with mile long nature trail and picnic facilities				●	
NATURAL SYSTEMS FOCUS AREA						
Gateway: Panola Mountain State Park	Features unique ecosystems and wildlife of the South River and the National Natural Landmark of Panola Mountain. Park expansion will offer increased recreational opportunities	●		●	●	●
Parker Home (part of Panola Mountain State Park expansion)	Oldest home in Rockdale County, built in approx. 1822, home of last cotton farmer in area			●		
Alexander Estate (part of Panola Mountain State Park expansion)	Farm house with lake, recreational opportunities			●		

VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
NATURAL SYSTEMS FOCUS AREA (CONTINUED)						
Power of Flight Bird Habitat (part of Panola Mountain State Park)	Crane migratory preserve				●	
SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE FOCUS AREA						
Gateway: Monastery of the Holy Spirit	Founded in 1944, Roman Catholic Monastery of the OCSO, offers prayer services, retreats, Cistercian vocation, Abbey Store, & contains an archeological, butterfly, and dragonfly collection. Over 2,000 acres of protected land including streams and wetlands.	●		●	●	●
Susong Home and Farm	Late 1940s granite home with opportunity to become nature center			●	●	
Enslaved African Cemetery	Approximately 12 graves marked by small stones			●		●
Native American Mound	Probably used as a religious site, overgrown with trees			●		●
Honey Creek	Riparian system & wetlands	●			●	
Historic Friendship Church	Remnants of foundation remain			●		●

VENUE IN FOCUS AREA	SIGNIFICANCE	THEMED ROUTES				
		Land of Rocks & Rivers	Stone Cutters	Early Settlers	Ecosystem Excursion	Spiritual Experience
VENUES OUTSIDE OF FOCUS AREAS						
Camp Smyrna	Presbyterian campground – meeting spaces surrounded by rustic cabins & recreational facilities					●
Wolf Rock	Granite outcrop	●			●	
Yellow River	Cultural, recreation, and natural resources	●				
The Mall at Stonecrest	Recreation and economic resource for residents and visitors			●		
Stone Mountain Park, located north of AMHA	3,200 acre park offering outdoor entertainment & recreation, largest mass of exposed granite		●			

With the completion of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Management Plan, a clearly marked path lies ahead. Though the Plan is ambitious and will take many years to complete, its goals are all within reach.

The Arabia Alliance and its partners can use the Plan's framework as a tangible road map to connect and protect the Heritage Area's diverse treasures as one gigantic living museum.

Remarkably, large areas of land remain intact. Priceless historic and cultural sites still exist. Yet, the climate is quickly changing.

As Georgia's population continues to climb, people are realizing the value of parks and natural areas as more and more greenspace is lost to development in cities and suburbs.

An Arabia Mountain Heritage Area can become another cherished place in Georgia's marvelous collection of tourist attractions, on par with Stone Mountain Park, the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site in downtown Atlanta, and the Augusta Canal National Heritage Area -- yet with a character all its own. Now is the time to embrace this Plan and enthusiastically rally around it.

Like ancient granite siblings, Arabia and Panola have weathered time and the elements for about 400 million years.

Perhaps they finally speak to us through this Plan.