



Purser-Hulsey Park

I'll admit I'm easily excited by new places to explore. But some destinations leave me feeling particularly inspired. Such is the case with Purser-Hulsey Park in Matthews. About 15 miles from uptown, it's a relatively short, easy drive to get there. It boasts plentiful parking, a large community garden, a little free library and, most notably, some really fun trails.

Here's why I recommend you make this your next local hiking destination: The Painted Rock Trail is a 1.5 mile loop. This natural surface, gently undulating trail is heavily shaded and just the right difficulty and distance for a pleasant, manageable outing. What makes it remarkable is the clever painted rock trail markers. In all our many hikes, we've seen countless blazes -- dots painted on tree trunks, flags wrapped around branches, printed signs stuck in the ground -- but never anything so creative and interactive.

You'll find the trailhead at the back of the parking lot, next to an information kiosk. Just inside the tree line is a large, instructive rock that explains the painted rocks and invites folks to engage with them throughout the hike.

Someone with notable artistic talent has painted at least a hundred rocks and placed them along the trail loop. All of them are beautiful, and some are especially witty. Visitors are encouraged to pick them up and leave them in a new spot along the trail as they hike (this is an especially effective motivator for young hikers!).

And, park visitors are invited to bring their own painted rocks to add to the mix. Purser-Hulsey is a relatively new park -- the trails were only just finished last year -- but I can imagine a really fun, creative vibe taking root as more folks share their own creativity.

If you're up for a longer hike, the Enchanted Forest Trail offers an additional half-mile loop just off the Painted Rock Trail. As the name suggests, this sidetrack winds you through a pretty magical stretch of young, tall pines, where fairies might as well frolic when the sun goes down.

And, if you're up for an even longer option, the 3-mile backside loop is also accessible from the Painted Rock Trail. As with all the trails at Purser-Hulsey, this trail is open to both hikers and bike riders. At every turn, make sure you choose the direction that corresponds with your mode of transport (boots or bikes) for safety's sake.

You'll also find benches scattered throughout the park if you want to take a break and enjoy the peace this natural refuge offers. (Note: There are no restroom facilities at Purser-Hulsey Park, so plan accordingly.)



How to get there: Purser-Hulsey Park is located at 13201 Phillips Rd., Matthews, NC, 28105.