



## Belle Isle - Richmond, Virginia

| Length              | Difficulty   | Streams | Views | Solitude | Camping |
|---------------------|--|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| 2.1 mls             | ★  | ★       | ★     | ★        | N/A     |
| <b>Hiking Time:</b> | 1.0 hours plus a half hour for lunch               |         |       |          |         |
| <b>Elev. Gain:</b>  | 55 ft  |         |       |          |         |
| <b>Parking:</b>     | Park on Tredegar St at the Belle Isle parking area |         |       |          |         |

Belle Isle is a deceptively named, family friendly, wheelchair accessible hike in the middle of the James River with the downtown skyline of Richmond, VA visible in the background. If you just walked around and looked only at the river, the trees, the birds, the climbing cliffs, etc, you would certainly agree that it is a "Belle Isle". On the other hand if you read some of the posted signs and looked around at the evidence of its prior use, you might be transported back to a time when it was not a Belle Isle: a granite quarry pit, a power plant, an iron milling factory, an iron foundry, and the most haunting of all – A Civil War prison camp where over 1,000 Union soldiers died from deprivation.

From the parking lot, head under the train trestle to the sidewalk and take a right heading to the hanging bridge underneath the Lee Bridge (Route 1/301). It is about 0.5 miles to the other side of the bridge from the parking area. Stay straight as you come off the foot bridge and go about 100 yards and bear to the right following the river. The area to the right at this intersection was the Civil War Prison Camp cemetery (bodies since removed). Continue following the trail along the river with many side paths leading to rocks on the river that have great photo opportunities. Caution: during times when the river is high it is not advisable to go rock hopping. The summer sees many people out here for the day relaxing on the rocks getting their feet wet.

The cemetery visible on the opposite bank is the Hollywood Cemetery where Presidents Monroe and Tyler are buried along with President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis, Confederate General JEB Stuart and thousands of civil war soldiers.

About 0.4 miles from the first intersection you will see the rock quarry and pond on the left. Rock climbing is allowed in the quarry but at your own risk. 200 yards beyond the quarry is a picnic area with some more opportunities for exploring the rocks on the river. 150 yards beyond the picnic area is a side trail to see some of the remnants of the power plant dam and more rock exploring. Continuing on the main loop trail, keep an eye out for the power plant and iron mill (made nails, wire, horseshoes, etc) and take a left in about 0.4 miles to head back to the foot bridge. From this point it is about 0.6 miles back to the parking area. The steel framed building on the right just before the bridge is the old iron foundry.

It may take you more than 1 hour to hike this trail if you stop and look at the many interesting views of the river and the remnants of Belle Isle's past.