


# Cruise The Ozarks™

THE Planning Guide for Motorcycle Riders

**SPECIAL EDITION**

## Heart of the Ozarks

- 
- A photograph of several motorcyclists riding on a paved road that curves through a lush, green, wooded area. In the foreground, a man on a black Harley-Davidson motorcycle is looking towards the camera. He is wearing a black jacket, blue jeans, and a helmet with a colorful flame design. Behind him, another motorcyclist in a light blue shirt and a tan hat is visible. Further back, another rider is partially seen. The road has yellow double lines and a blue sign is visible in the distance.
- **Cruising Through the Heart of the Ozarks**
  - **Start Your Own Ozarks Bucket List**
  - **12 Ride Maps of Great Riding Across the Ozarks**

**ISSUE #15 • 2024 • FREE**

**Plan your ride at [www.CruiseTheOzarks.com](http://www.CruiseTheOzarks.com)**

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One of our favorite pictures from the Fayetteville era of Bikes, Blues & BBQ. It was used on the cover of Issue #5. BBB is now thriving in its new home, Rogers, Ark.



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No matter what time of year, there's always plenty of fun things to do in Eureka Springs to make lasting memories!

An aerial photograph of a winding road, AR 43, snaking through a lush, forested valley. The road is paved and curves through green fields and dense woods. A small creek flows alongside the road in some areas. The surrounding hills are covered in trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and green. The sky is clear and blue.

# HEART

*of the Ozarks*

*By David Bell*

I live in the midst of plenty, with an embarrassment of riches... riding-wise, that is. I'm surrounded by ribbons of pavement winding along the ridges and hills and valleys of the Ozarks. They pass through gorgeous scenery, often beside the creeks and streams that have carved the rugged landscape and terrain of northern Arkansas.

*AR 43 snaking through the Boxley Valley along the Buffalo National River on its way to Ponca, Ark.*

***Continued on Page 6***



*This rider begins his ride on the Berryville Square...*



*...and this rider flies "Old Glory" on U.S. 62 near Thorncrown Chapel.*

Continued from page 5

## One of my favorite rides in the Heart of the Ozarks

There are numerous Ozarks highways that I can string together for a great ride. And my cure for a common weekend is a ride through the Ozarks — one that captures the essence of this wonderful area. Depending on whether I want to cruise leisurely or drag a knee on its sharp curves, a ride can eat up an entire day or it can be over in a few hours. Here's the low-down on some of the fantastic stretches of road I consider the 'Heart of the Ozarks'.

I can motor 11 miles south out of Ber-

ryville on AR 21, to a dot on the map called Metalton, and catch County Road 719. This back road cutoff intersects with AR 103 and runs east to U.S. 412. I stay on AR 103 and ride east to Osage, home to a few houses and a pottery shop located a historic country store. The community, though, is mostly a way point on my ride. From Osage, AR 103 makes a wonderful serpentine run to AR 43, which weaves down into the Buffalo River/Boxley Valley area at Ponca.

The homesteaded community of Pon-

ca is a tiny place on the extreme north end of the beautiful Boxley Valley. However, it does have a thriving economy based on canoeing, hiking and other outdoor activities, including riding the fantastic roads of the area. It sits on the southern end of one of the best sport bike stretches in the Ozarks, the 14 miles of AR 74 from Ponca to Jasper, and it climbs more than 600 feet vertically via a series of switchbacks rivaling the Dragon. There are heavily timbered drop-offs on the west side and a steep hillside on

*Unwritten rule of the road—this guy has the right-of-way. Downtown Jasper is a true gem in the Heart of the Ozarks, regardless of the time of day.*



the east side.

Eleven miles from Ponca, keep an eye out for Wayne Clark's whimsical motorcycle tree. He started hanging mostly Japanese bikes on this tree "because I could get them so cheap," he says with a smile. It's true motorcycle art and a don't-miss photo opportunity.

**In Arkansas there's a town called Diamond City.** But there's only one true jewel in the crown of the Ozarks — the small mountain village of Jasper, on AR 7. Jasper and Newton County prospered in the 1960s and '70s after the designation of the Buffalo River as the nation's first National River. Coincidentally the area also benefited from the influx of back-to-the-earth hippies. Locals and the newly arrived counterculture types got along very well, and Jasper developed into this wonderful recreational destination. More recently, motorcyclists discovered Jasper and it has grown into a popular stop for riders.

Jasper has several restaurants, shops and lodging for riders. Plus, there are no better roads in the Ozarks than those in Newton County.

**Continuing to ride south on AR 7, I catch AR 374** and cruise over to AR 123 and my next way-point, Mount Judea, another tiny Ozarks mountain community.

The 50-mile stretch of AR 123 from Mount Judea — locals call it "Mount Judy" — to Clarksville is one of the best single-highway rides in the Ozarks. AR 123 climbs south from Mount Judea with three-and-a-half miles of switchbacks and tight curves. The highway features both broad and tight sweepers that run across a line of beautiful ridges. There's a spot where AR 123, AR 7, and AR 16 all intersect — Pelsor, aka Sand Gap. I call it 'The Trifecta', the intersection of three great Ozarks highways

There's a '30s era country store there that's a convenient rally point, Hankins Country Store. It's a convenient place to grab a burger or sandwich, a snack, a bottle of water, or fuel up your ride. AR 123 dives southwest from Pelsor and crosses one of the Ozarks' premier float streams, Big Piney, via a beautiful 1930s-era one-lane steel-truss bridge. I stopped to photograph the bridge and a couple of sport bike riders pulled over to chat before continuing their attack on the highway

**My ride continues south to U.S. 64,** which takes me west to Clarksville. From this small college town I can get home by a couple of different great routes. On this ride I take AR 103 north, not physically connected to the previously traveled AR 103 through Osage. This section of AR 103 soon becomes very twisty ride, as it climbs back into the Heart of the Ozarks. It leads to AR 215 and yet another tiny mountain town called Oak, with no "z". It's a very popular stop with riders and is home to the oldest continuously operating general store in Arkansas — since 1890. It features a wonderful restaurant, serving great burgers, homemade pies and much more. And it has fuel.

**Taking the winding AR 21 back west out of Oak** leads to a ride north on half of the Pig Trail, on AR 23. The 24-mile long Pig Trail earns its unique moniker mostly because it's a fantastic scenic and twisty ride. At the intersect AR 16 I'm officially off the Pig Trail and AR 23 and AR 16 run together for a few miles. I can either stay on AR 23 north to Eureka Springs, or take AR 16 to AR 21. AR 21 breaks off south down into the lower Boxley Valley, headwa-



**Above:** The 'Peanuts' comic strip had a kite-eating tree but Jasper has an infamous motorcycle-eating tree, on the homestead of rider Wayne Clark. "I didn't start out to make a pro-Harley statement. It's just that the old junker Japanese bikes were less expensive," Clark said. **Below:** A vintage Goldwing tackles the twists and curves of AR 341, aka Push Mountain Road.



ters of the Buffalo River. The valley is often described as one of the most gorgeous areas in the entire Ozarks and AR 21 takes me back home to Berryville.

With the conclusion of this ride I have completed one of the most iconic rides in the Heart of the Ozarks.

**CTO**

# Eureka Springs...

**Plan to visit this Victorian gem of the Ozarks!**

*Eureka Springs is a magical photo-op stop, especially at Basin Spring Park downtown.*

Native Americans revered these springs for their healing properties. The many different tribes who visited the area made a pact that while at these special sacred places they would put aside their differences and quarrels and avoid all conflict while there.

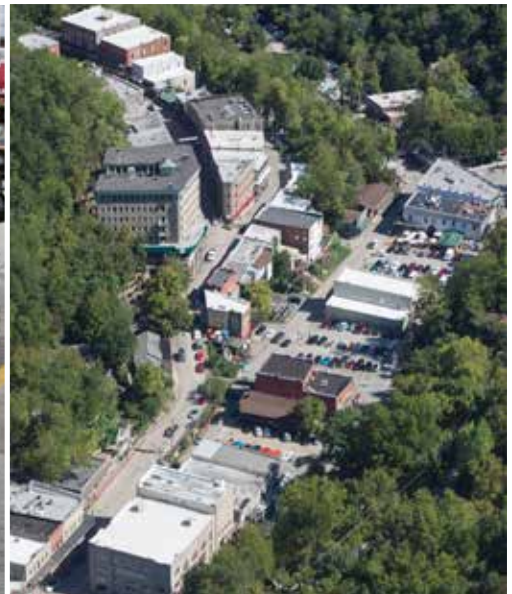
So, when White settlers discovered this area they, too, appreciated the health benefits of what they eventually would call Eureka Springs, a Victorian-era destination. And Eureka Springs' economy has always been tied to water... and the tourism that the waters brought. Even before the city was founded, on July 4th, 1896, its reputation for healing water was known across the country. Most notably its water was sold under the name "Ozarka Water", which is still a brand-name today. It was nicknamed "the town that water built". Even after modern medicine began to bring an end to the notion of healing waters Eureka Springs continued to thrive.

Today the city is known for its eclectic personality, a draw for artists and a wonderful destination for riders who want to enjoy the fantastic roads of the Ozarks by day and have a great nightlife experience afterward.

CTO



**Above & below:** Riders enjoy downtown Eureka Springs for relaxing and cruising.



**Above:** Downtown Eureka Springs' Historic Loop. **Below:** Riders enjoy Basin Spring Park.



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## The Dam Bridge Loop

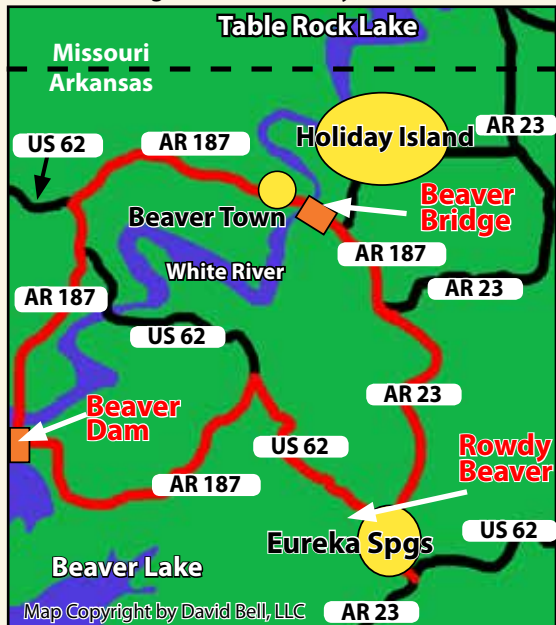
Eureka Springs is not just a place to hang out in the evenings after a day in the saddle. Eureka is also a destination in itself. There are plenty of activities and diversions around the area besides riding, as evidenced by the number of those who come to town in autos just to take in

the shopping, dining and outdoor recreational opportunities offered by this part of the Ozarks.

But riders come for the opportunities to take in the gorgeous scenery and enjoy the roads.

So, during the long days of summer there is plenty of time to enjoy not only this fantastic Victorian destination but also to make this wonderful short ride across the unique, historic Beaver Bridge and the massive Beaver Dam. Connecting these two is a loop I call "The Dam Bridge Loop". It's a 26-mile ride that's a perfect sampling of both the scenic byways as well as the twisty roads that are representative of the "Heart of the Ozarks". It will be a memorable 45 minute highlight of your visit to Eureka Springs.

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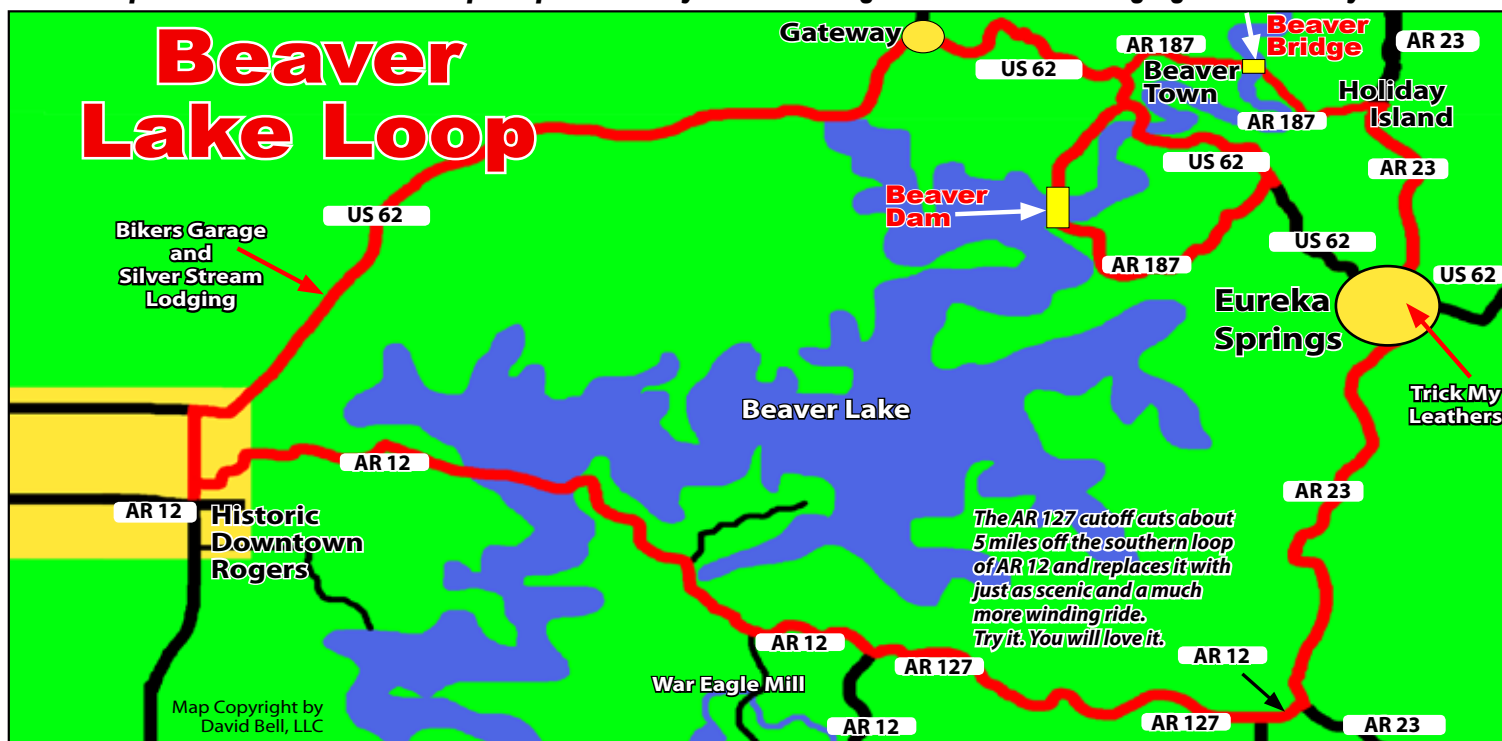
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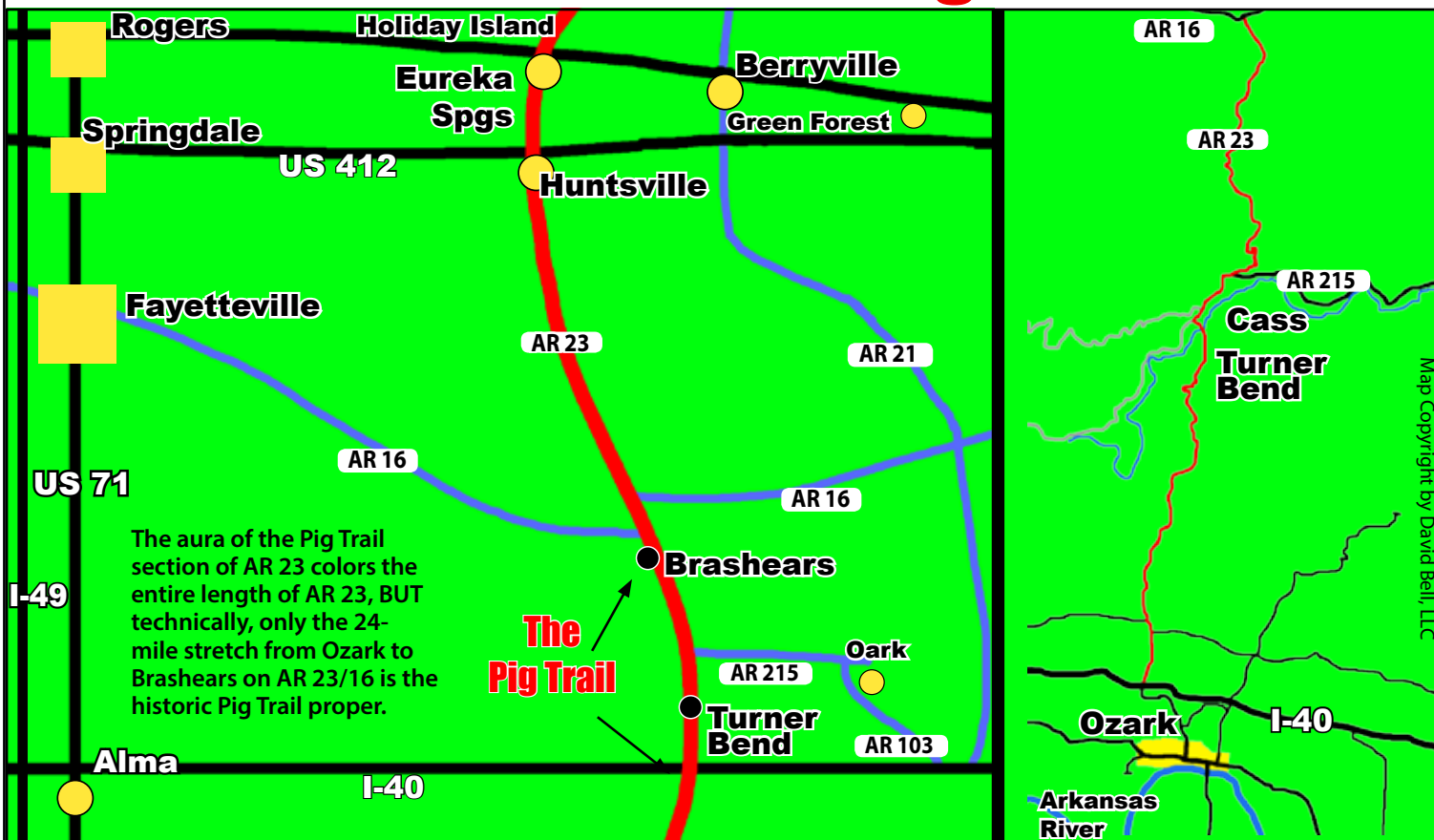
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## AR 23 and "The Pig Trail"



# STEP BACK IN TIME...

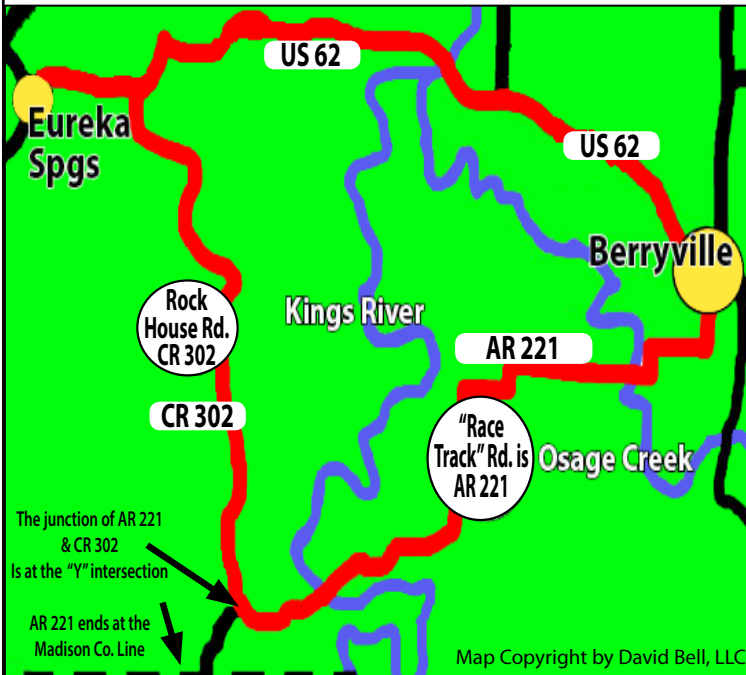
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## Race Track Road



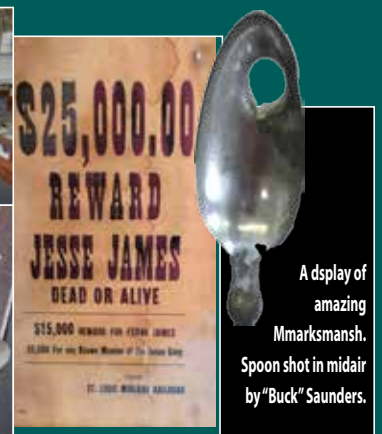
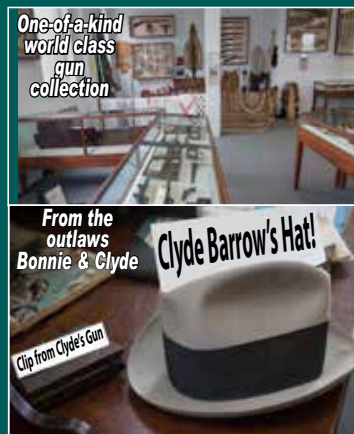
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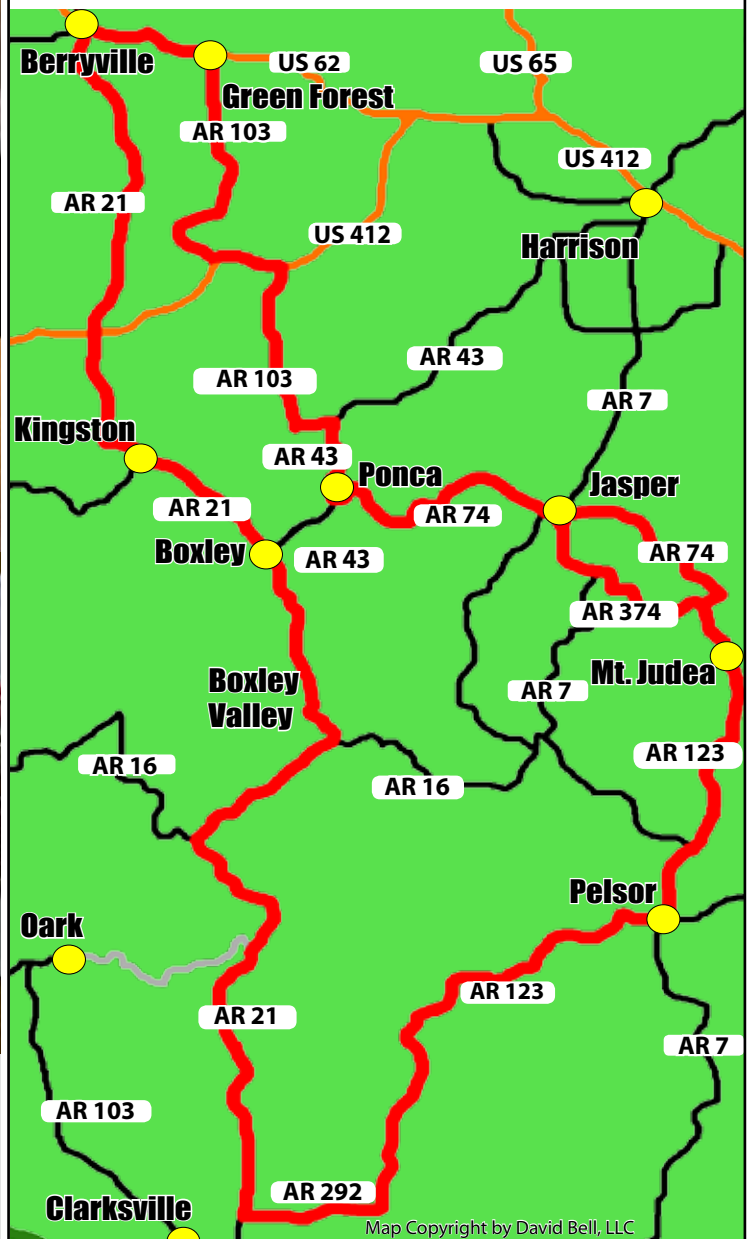
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## Heart of the Ozarks



The southern junction of AR 7/16/123,  
the Trifecta of great roads at Pelsor,  
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The homestead of "Beaver Jim"  
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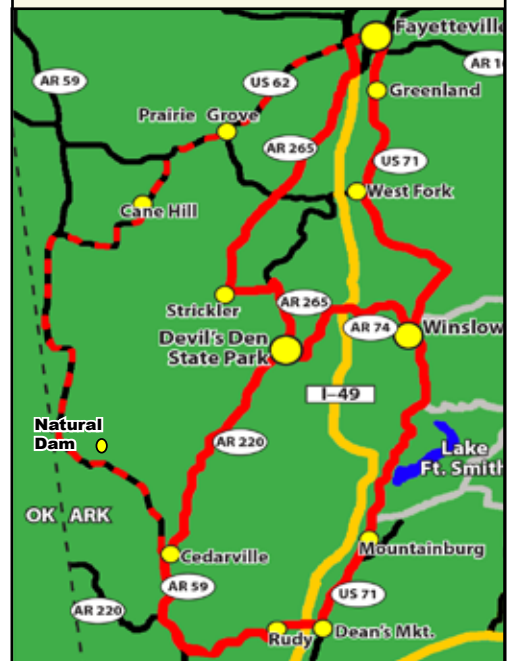
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# The Wild Hog Ride

The four-city metroplex in Northwest Arkansas — Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers and Bentonville is a busy center of commerce — Walmart, Tyson Foods, JB Hunt, Bikes, Blues & BBQ — and the famous “Pig Trail”, portion of AR 23. It's also home to the University of Arkansas, consistent source of pride for decades. The state loves their interestingly named UofA mascot, the Arkansas Razorback, hence the name of this wonderful, serpentine ride.

US 71 was the bane of Razorback fans — and truckers, too — for decades. Which is why fans used to take “The Pig Trail” to football games, even though it was a much more winding ride up through the mountains of AR 23. It wasn't nearly so dangerous to life and limb.

But today the truck traffic is on Interstate 49. And old US 71 (now designated the Boston Mtn. Scenic Byway) is actually fun to ride, as we old-timers used to think it would be without truck traffic. Create a great ramble with any of the red or red/black roads. Local riders love it, and so will you, 99.9% guaranteed. **CTO**



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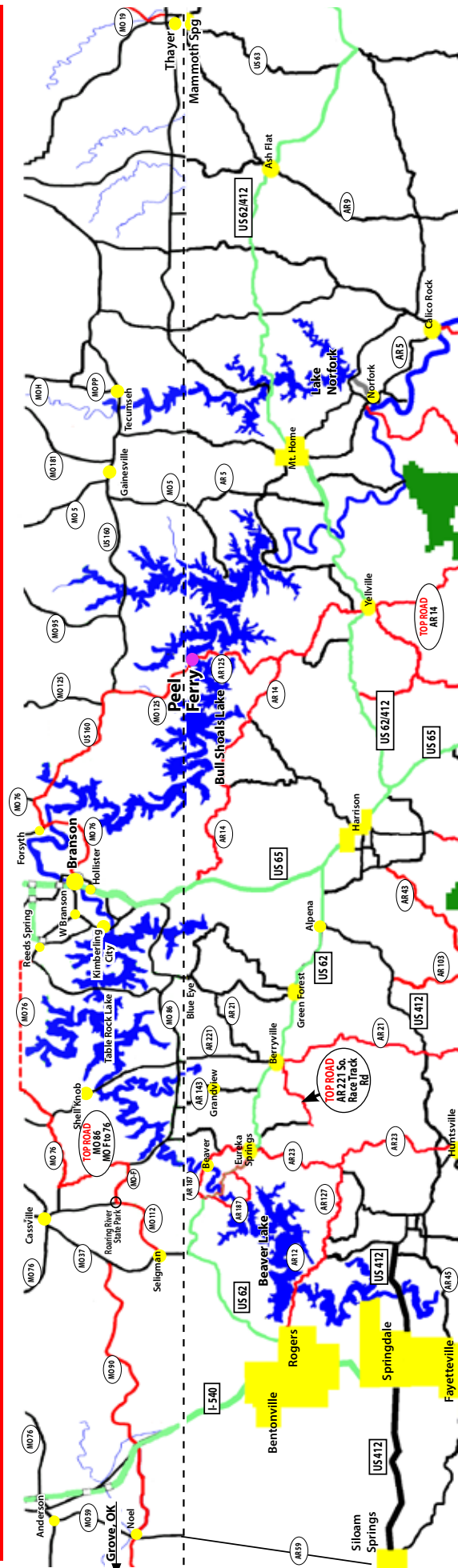
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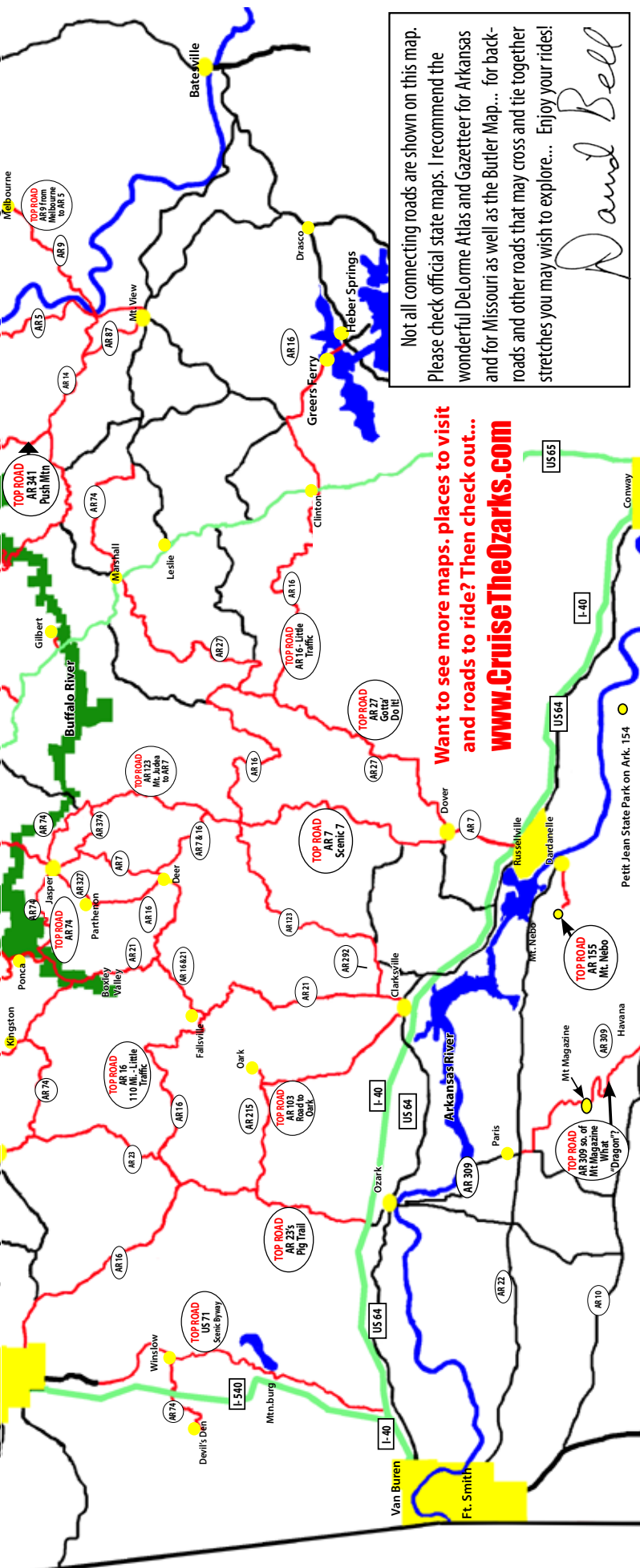
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# Best Roads in the Ozarks

Most any road you ride in the Ozarks will be enjoyable. The red routes shown here are some of my favorites for you to try... the routes I think are the **best in the Ozarks**.

The ones marked as “**Top Roads**” will give you the most in challenging riding, great scenery and enjoyable touring. Since many of the **Top Roads** are **technically challenging**, always **use caution**, especially when riding on **unknown, unfamiliar roads**. Watch out for **gravel (especially in the curves)** as well as both **wild and domestic animals**. Always be sure to check on road conditions after heavy rains that may affect road surfaces.





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# What roads are on your...

## BUCKET LIST?

*Hidden amongst the mountains and lush foliage of the Ozarks are fantastic geological features, like Hawksbill Crag, beautiful scenery, and serpentine roads. Here are six of the most challenging of those winding roads for your consideration.*

### **The Pig Trail/AR 23 – Ozark to Brashears – c. 24 mi.**

The Pig Trail/AR 23 – Ozark to Brashears – c. 24 mi. Without equivocation, it can say that AR 23 has more of what most every rider wants, all rolled into one bold and often brash stretch of asphalt. Over the years, various driving and car magazines have named AR 23 in general, and The Pig Trail specifically, as one of the best driving roads in America. Ditto for riding. Ozark, Ark., on the Arkansas River, was named for the mountains to the north. And that's where the renowned 'Pig Trail' begins. Practically, though, it runs from I-40 north to Brashears on AR 16. The Pig Trail was a popular route to football games of the Arkansas Razorbacks.



*AR 23 is home to the renowned Pig Trail, much of it through long tunnels of foliage.*



### **AR 9 – Allison to Melbourne – c. 20mi.**

This ride is in the eastern Ozarks is one of the very best stretches of highway in the Ozarks... AR 9. It runs south of Melbourne, Ark., down to AR 5 at Allison. Not as many riders have discovered this highway – on my list of the Top Ten Roads – as say "The Pig Trail". This fantastic sportbike ride is as twisty as The Pig Trail, and equally as exciting. If you just looked at the Arkansas State Highway map you might definitely overlook this ride. But a quick glance at DeLorme's fine Arkansas Atlas and Gazetteer will give a better feel for what this road has to offer. This is a genuine "money" highway.

*AR 9, from Allison to Melbourne, is a Butler Maps gold rated road for good reason.*

### **AR 74 – from Ponca to Jasper – c. 14 mi.**

Ponca sits in the north end of Boxley Valley and is home to the upper Buffalo National River. But, it's also on the western end of one of the best stretches of roads in the Ozarks... AR 74. After crossing the Buffalo, AR 74 climbs over 600 feet in elevation on very winding pavement. It's a twisty ride on to Jasper. The road is fantastic, as is the destination, Jasper, a wonderful mountain village.

*The mile-and-a-half romp out of Ponca on AR 74 is as much fun as the Dragon and other popular roads.*



### **AR 27 – Tilly to Hector – c. 27 mi.**

Amid all the great roads in the Heart of the Ozarks, others are often overlooked as they spread across the Boston Mountains. And one of those roads you really should give a try is Arkansas 27. It begins at Harriet at AR 14 and runs almost the entire length of the state to the Coastal Timber area of extreme southwest on US 71. Besides running over and along numerous ridges and through deep valleys, the road runs down the steep mountains into the Arkansas River Valley at Russellville. Switchbacks and hair pin curves climb into the Ozarks.

*Helmet, gloves, boots and denim bib overalls... all the protective gear an Ozarks farmer needs for a ride down AR 27.*



# Five of our favorite places “Off the Beaten Path”



Ponca General Store, Ponca, Ark., on the upper end of the Buffalo National River.



Top and above: Natural Dam swimming hole.

What is it about being in the middle of nowhere that's so much fun on a ride? Whether it's in the backwoods on an ADV bike or just out on lesser traveled pavement on a street bike, you will certainly come across little places with tons of personality and scenic beauty. Or perhaps it's the excitement of discovering interesting places with lots of history or charm.

**Here are five off-the-beaten-path places you should check out.**

**PONCA** If there's a 'home base' for floating as well as the other wonderful activities available on the Buffalo it would have to be

**Here are five “off-the-beaten-path” places that will reward you for your exploration. These quaint and historic locations are surrounded by dynamite riding and interesting history. Find maps to them at [www.CruiseTheOzarks.com](http://www.CruiseTheOzarks.com).**

the community of Ponca, found in the gorgeous Boxley Valley at the intersection of AR 43 and AR 74. The Buffalo was named for the animals that once populated the valley... elk, too. Elk have been reintroduced and now thrive in the area. All roads into Ponca are fantastic riding & driving roads, along with great scenery.

**WINSLOW** There are several disjointed roads that carry the AR 74 designation... all are wonderful roads. But, the one that crosses I-49 is exceptionally nice. It's twisty, runs through drop-dead



**Top:** A working and scenic railroad runs through Winslow, crossing the scenic AR 74 W., which runs to a state park, Devil's Den. **Right:** AR 74 winds its way down into Devil's Den State Park. **Above:** Though Winslow is a tiny berg, it still sees a good deal of traffic on the way to Devil's Den and a museum at City Hall, with a “60-era chopped Triumph Bonneville on loan from a local resident.

gorgeous scenery and leads not only through an interesting little berg but also to a dynamite Arkansas state park – Devil’s Den. It was constructed during the WPA era by CCC workers of the ‘30s. AR 74 there is real treat for riders and drivers. It has vintage cabins, and camping picnic areas, along with a rock dam forming a wonderful lake. Winslow used to be known for its logging, carried to markets on the north/south railroad, which is still commercially active today.

**Rush** This former zinc mining town at one time was home to as many as 5,000. They were expecting the ore they discovered was



silver, but turned out to be zinc. It was mined there until the bottom fell out of the zinc market right after WW-I, Today it’s a genuine, real-deal 1880s ghost town, located just a few miles off AR 14 on Newton Co. Road 6035, and sits on the Buffalo River. A visit to Rush is a visit to life in the Ozarks of the 19th Century. And like those Western and Southwestern mining towns that became home to ‘ghosts’, you may feel like you’re being watched.

**Natural Dam** Natural Dam, Ark. is a rural bedroom community for Ft. Smith and Van Buren. The small, natural lake on Lee Creek, was created by a rock ledge across the river, forming a natural dam. It’s on AR 59, 15 miles north of Van Buren, just off the Wild Hog Ride. The best approach, highway-wise, is AR 220 from Devil’s Den south to AR 59, then north. Slip your swim suit on under your jeans and take a dip in this old-fashioned swimming hole.

**Gilbert** The founding force for Gilbert, Ark. was the abundant timber reserves of this area of the Buffalo River valley. A railroad ran to Gilbert, but went away when the timber was used up. The old store survives, along with several residences. It thrives on the recre-



**Top:** Rush was not totally abandoned until the mid-1960’s with Buffalo National River’s creation. These are two of the last homes to have been occupied. **Above:** Hiking trails take you to the mine/commercial areas of Rush, here an old shop survives.

ational opportunities provided by the Buffalo River. You can’t get more “off the beaten path” than Gilbert. AR 333 runs three miles from U.S. 65 at Ferguson’s Country Store and it’s a real trip to the past. Rent a canoe, get something to eat, or take a picture.

Don’t stop with these. There are lots of other roads and places in the Ozarks that fill the bill for being “off the beaten path”. **CTO**



**Above:** Gilbert once thrived on timber. Today it survives on tourism, in particular floating on the Buffalo National River. **Left:** Riders enjoy the winding AR 333 that runs from U.S. 65 and make the requisite stop at the historic Gilbert Store for refreshments or lunch, and souvenirs.

**See CruiseTheOzarks.com for a ride map for this story.**

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## Plan to See The Total Eclipse Across the Ozarks



Here's a map of the swath of the 2024 eclipse across the Ozarks and impacted towns. The darker portion is the zone of totality. Go to the Ozark Vitality website to see this map and get more information at [OzarkVitality.com](http://OzarkVitality.com) or their partner in this corporate effort, Ozark Small Business Incubator, at [ozsbi.com](http://ozsbi.com). They are planning a big Eclipse '24 celebration for four days in their hometown base of West Plains, Missouri.



In 2017 students at the Berryville Elementary School made masks with eclipse viewing glasses attached so they could observe a partial in Berryville.

Carlie Simon sings about a former boyfriend she said was so vain she said to him, "you flew your Lear Jet up to Nova Scotia to see the total eclipse of the sun."

Well, this year I only have to "fly" my 2015 Triumph Bonneville to Clinton, Ark. to see the total eclipse of the sun on April 8. To me, total eclipses have always been exotic events that took special effort to view. Not this one. I've been told that to see one is akin to a spiritual experience.

And I only have to do what I enjoy anyway... that's just to Cruise the Ozarks.

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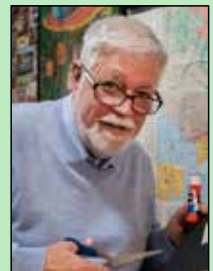
Here I am on my 1971 Yamaha RD 350, c. 1974.

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*David Bell*

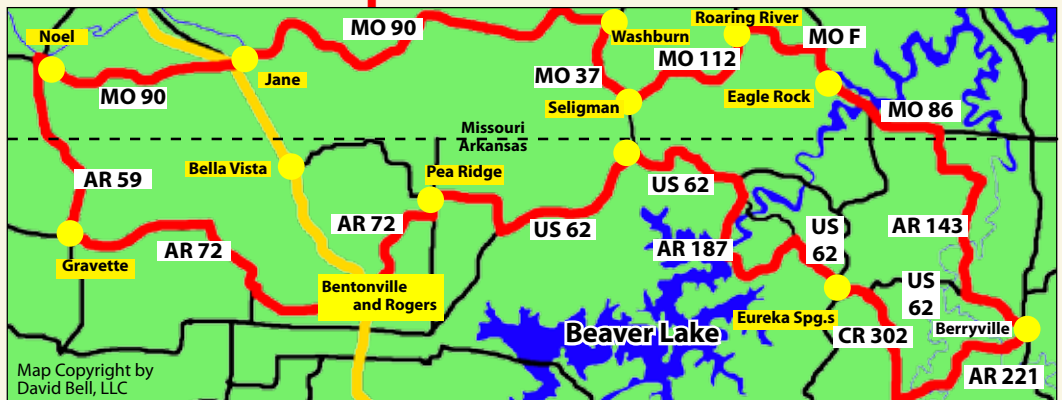


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This is a wonderful loop through the western Ozarks — across NW Arkansas and SW Missouri. It's very winding, and it's very beautiful, too. The region is home to important business centers in Bentonville and Rogers. The area offers numerous opportunities for diversions — Rogers plays host to Bikes, Blues and BBQ, while Bentonville is the home of the world-class Museum of American Art — Crystal Bridges, a gift from the Walton family. Rogers is also the site of the Arkansas Music Pavilion, a world-class venue. The rest of the ride is pure motorcycling at its best, across the best parts of two states. The Ozarks is, indeed, mid-America's premier riding destination.

**This map of the MOArk Loop is sponsored by CruiseTheOzarks.com**

## The MOArk Loop: Best of Two States



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