

# Dream Little Dream

FOUR STATE PARKS IN F

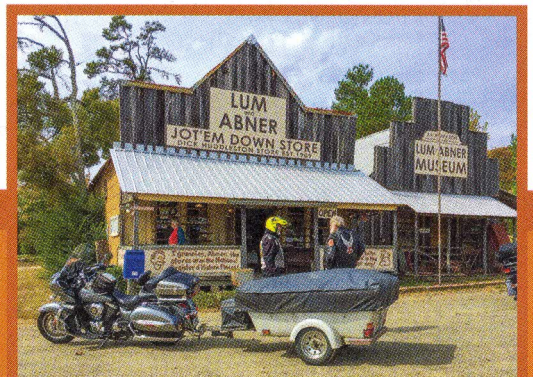
# a am... OUR DAYS.

If Walt Disney had ever designed a theme park for motorcycle riders, he would have called it Arkansas. The whole state is what riders of all kinds dream about, and the state park system is a fantasy of freedom for us children of the wind to embrace. Ride, eat, sleep, repeat.

Just south of Harrison, U.S. Route 65 winds through several small villages before cresting a steep slope running down to bridge the pristine Buffalo National River. In St. Joe, Ferguson's Country Store and Restaurant tempts us with superb home cooking and the biggest dang cinnamon roll on the planet. The road dives steeply to the park boundary just north of the river. Stop at Grinder's Ferry to see canoes and tubes full of people floating away their cares. A lot of riders park their bikes on the pebbled banks, toss up a tent and camp here, eating fish right from the stream and swapping lies about the fish and the bikes, and marveling at how this totally free site just can't be real.

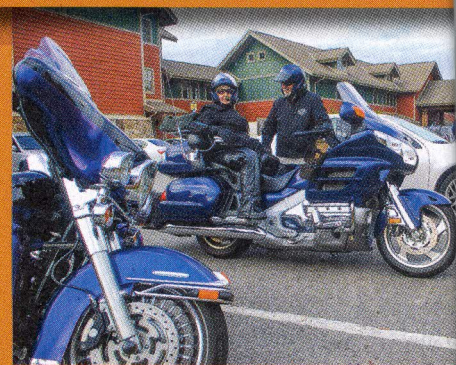
U.S. 65, mostly two lanes all the way to Conway, is a sweeping roller coaster that flies us over the crest at Silver Hill. To the right is Tyler Bend Visitor Center and campground, and next, a couple of canoe and kayak rental outfitters.

Ten miles south is the town of Marshall, where we turn off into the mountains toward our first overnight, Ozark Folk Center State Park. We gas up and take a deep breath, then turn left just south of town onto State Highway 27, up to ultra-loopy State Highway 14 at Harriet. This road was laid out following a wagon track. Quick twisties and sharp changes of elevation challenge any two-wheeler, including my fully loaded Harley. The Ozark Folk Center is snuggled into a hollow with Mountain View, "The Folk Music Capital of the World." Pickers and grinners jam around the stone-cut buildings



In the '40s and '50s the *Lum and Abner* radio show was set in fictional Pine Ridge. Today Kathryn Stucker takes you back in her replica of the famous "Joe 'em Down Store" that became a byword for rural Arkansas. Today, Pine Ridge is a real place on the road to Mena.

BY BOB JACOBS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHOR  
AND MAX JACOBS



The Lodge at Mount Magazine attracts riders from all over the country. This couple just rode in from Dallas, Texas. At this time of year (October), as their gear shows, it can be chilly in the mornings and evenings.



Above: The Queen Wilhelmina Lodge at the second highest peak in Arkansas overlooks peaks and valleys all the way into Oklahoma. Reopened last year after a \$10 million renovation, it was named for the Queen of the Netherlands, despite the fact that Her Majesty never visited. Far left: Local musicians play an authentic folk music concert in the 1,000-seat auditorium at the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View. Left: During the day here, folk bands like Whoa Mule appear outdoors in the park, and in one of the many craft shops.



surrounding the town square.

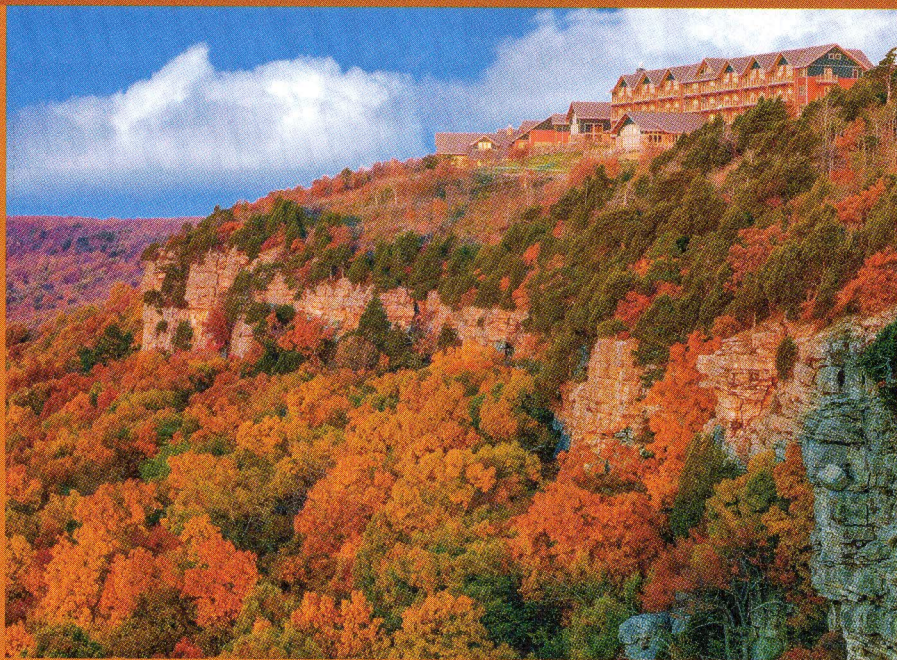
Live mountain music abounds during the evenings in the 1,000-seat auditorium, and during the daytime at outdoor venues in the park itself. This is the music that made America great, played and sung by adults and kids who have learned and passed down the songs through generations. The performances are exactly what the Grand Ole Opry was in Nashville before the Las Vegas/Branson mentality turned it all commercial and glib.

By day, crafters demonstrate the skills that hill people brought here centuries ago from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Germany. This prism of the past was cut off from much of the outside world, until the roads in and out

were finally paved around 1960. An annual August event in town is the Mountains, Music and Motorcycles rally, and I encourage you to make a two-wheel pilgrimage you won't regret.

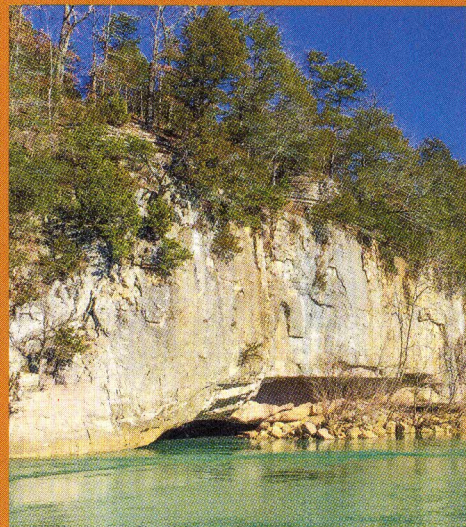
Heading west from Mountain View on State Highway 66, we enjoy twisting vistas and 8-percent grades all along the ridge route down to Leslie. We try lunch at the Skylark Café as we enter town; it's run by two ladies in an old house. Homemade pies to die for! Then we wander this cute village's artsy antique shops before jumping back on two wheels and crossing the creek to U.S. 65 south.

The road is two-lane blacktop, sweeping politely through bite-sized towns that will tempt you to stop at



Sitting atop Magazine Mountain, the highest peak in the state (2,753 feet), the Lodge offers breathtaking views across the river valley below. Adventurers can rock climb, rappel, hang glide, horseback ride, camp out, jump on an ATV or just enjoy the twisting roller coaster highway up and down again.

Below: The Buffalo National River was the nation's first such designated river. It flows for more than 150 miles. This section, near Highway 65 on the way to The Ozark Folk Center, entertains floaters in canoes and inner tubes and kayaks. Camping is permitted anywhere you can pitch a tent—for free.



flea markets, antique shops and garage sales, and folks so happy to see and talk to you that you'll feel as welcome as a toad in Toad Hollow. Bikes are friend magnets here. I've ridden 48 states and a couple of European countries. Nowhere else has the sheer joy of the ride been so constant.

U.S. 65 turns into four lanes at Damascus, making for a short run to Conway, where we leave the Boston Mountains of the Ozarks to head west on Interstate 40 along the Arkansas River Valley. It rolls and cascades in giant sweepers before we turn onto two-lane State Highway 247 into Dardanelle, then take State Highway 27 west. This is sweet, rolling farm country dotted with small ranches and sprawling estates, frequently right across the road from each other. The air is rich with green growing crops and spreading trees, or the earthy aroma of fresh cut hay.

Bear right on State Highway 10 to Havana, where a sign points to Mount Magazine State Park. Turn right onto State Highway 309 and relax. Fragrant, warm zephyrs lull the senses in harmony with the rumble of the motorcycle. We roll easily through green and gold farm fields. Except for the sweeping turns, this could be anywhere in the Midwest. Then, with no warning, a massive formation looms ahead of us. Magazine Mountain is an anomalous hulking loaf of bread pushing up all alone 10 miles ahead. We shift a little on the bike, knowing something waits for us.

It's the highest point in the state at 2,753 feet; the topography is alpine and the blacktop challenging, switchbacking, twisting and lifting us more than 2,200 feet in just a couple of miles on this southern approach. My wife Max shouts, "Wheel!" through the darkening forest and incarnadine sky as we reach the peak and turn into Mount Magazine State Park. Perched on a cliff edge, the rough-

hewn lodge welcomes us and a host of fellow travelers. In the parking lot are bikes, trikes and riders from Texas, Oklahoma, Michigan and Canada, and us from Illinois; it was a party of happy, chatty common souls relishing a thrilling moment of shared experience.

The woodsy lodge has 60 rooms, each with a balcony overlooking the valley. There's a first-class restaurant, indoor heated pool and a lobby big enough for family reunions. Thirteen fully-equipped private cabins have valley views. Mount Magazine takes you all the way back to nature. One caution: don't do as we did and stay one night. Stay longer to appreciate it.

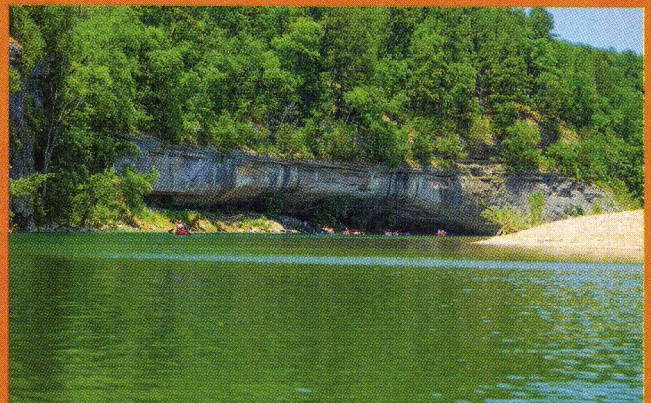
After sunrise coffee on our private balcony, we leave the mountain. Heading north on Highway 309 to Paris, then east on Highway 22, takes us to scenic Highway 7, going south through the Ouachita National Forest. Scenic? Yup. Byway? Yup. It's a literal roller coaster and Tilt-a-Whirl through pristine woods. No lollygagging as the twisties hurl to the right, then left, right, left. A "Whoeee" and a "Wowser" come from the back seat, and some mild hammering of my own heart for 68 miles. Fabulous! In Illinois, roads run north/south and east/west. Here, the road goes all of those ways, plus up and down, all at once!

Ouachita National Forest is rife with pine trees, crystal creeks, green canopies, cabins back in the woods and babbling brooks, conjuring images of fly fishing and moonshiners fanning slight smokiness through the trees. Breathe deep, and you're back in that Boy or Girl Scout camp of your youth—even if you never went to one.

Then suddenly, Highway 7 rolls right into historic downtown Hot Springs. Bathhouses and spas still abound as they did first for the Victorian wealthy, then Al Capone, Mugsy



Above: If you don't fancy a soft bed and hot shower at the end of the day's ride, Queen Wilhelmina offers comfy campsites with terrific views over the edge of the cliff. When I got out of the military, I vowed never to go camping again. But... Right: This trio from Houston, Texas, heading out from Mount Magazine State Park early in the morning, is on their way to the Ozark Folk Center. Bottom left: There's no limit to what sort of machines are ridden into the Ozarks. These couples left the parking lot just after sunrise to spend the day just cruising the mountains. Bottom right: The Buffalo River has carved hundreds of caves like this from the shale canyon. The river bottom is made up of tons of river rock, polished smooth by the constant flow of the wild, untamed river.



Moran, Lucky Luciano and other outlaws, until the 1960s when the place became an upscale resort, with luxury hotels, hot water spas and plentiful shopping to bring your ride to a stop. You can park on the main drag and walk awhile, soaking in some history, or take a splash in a spring-fed spa.

Leaving town, Highway 7 dashes across Lake Catherine and Lake Hamilton, and we close out the day at DeGray Lake Resort State Park. A true resort, the park is an emerald jewel in a faultless azure setting. The island lodge, surrounded by water, attaches to the shore via causeway, past a golf course and marina. We eat at the world-class Shoreline Restaurant, watching the stars sprinkle on the lake waters, then bed down in luxury. As different from each other as Cajun boudin is from a Coney dog, the parks we've stayed at so far are delightful.

The next morning, Highway 8 winds northwest through the laidback heart of the state. The country rolls like ocean swells, covered in breathtaking stands of oak, hawthorn, hickory and loblolly pine. Think of Hansel and Gretel leaving trails of crumbs to find their way in the dark forest, and you, a two-wheeled wraith spying in the shadowed woods.

We catch the wiggly Highway 88 all the way into Mena, with a quick stop first at Pine Ridge for a dose of nostalgia. As a kid, I listened to *Lum and Abner* on the radio after school. A replica of the old store from that radio show is next to a museum filled with memorabilia. Stop in and owner Kathryn Stucker will show you how famous these two characters were in the '40s and '50s.

A short, rolling ride west is Mena, with gas stations to fill your beast and 30 eateries to fill your belly, and Highway 88 becomes the Talimena National Scenic Byway to fill your soul. Heading northwest through town, we start the 2,681-foot climb to Queen Wilhelmina State Park and Lodge, on the second-highest peak in Arkansas. A "Castle in the Sky" looking all the way into Oklahoma, the lodge is a crystal fantasy. The feeling of peace and camaraderie with nature is compelling. This is the end of the trail: a great meal, a welcoming staff, conversations with new rider friends and quiet rest.

Overall, four days felt a bit rushed. Ten would be nicer. The parks are unparalleled destinations and we loved being there. But the journey—the ride, the "Wheeee," those Arkansas roads—was absolutely exquisite.

And there are lots more. **42**