

Mountain Marathon

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I love mountains, and I love state parks, so it stands to reason that I would really love mountains that are State Parks. Well I do, and recently I had the opportunity to visit four Arkansas State Parks that happen to be on the top of some very beautiful mountains located in the Ouachita Mountain Range and on the Southern side of the Arkansas River.

I had been contemplating this ride for a few months but was unsure when I would be able to attempt to complete what I had termed the Mountain Marathon.

I finally got the chance. At the weekly Wednesday pork chop lunch at Willie's Café, attended by several Goldwing riders, I mentioned my plan which was received with much interest. Several of the guys wanted to accompany me on this mountain trek.

So it was scheduled for the Tuesday of my week of vacation. It had to be coordinated to maximize attendance because most of us still have to work for a living. As the time to leave grew near, more and more riders pledged to participate. By the day of the ride, we had six bikes in all.

My idea was to meet at the junction of US highway 71 and US highway 70 in Southwest Arkansas. All the locals know this to be near a little convenience store called "Jo-Paul's". Although, the name was recently changed, but it will continue to be referred to as "Jo-Paul's for years to come. From there we would ride north to Cove, AR and then West into OK.

While waiting for the rest of the crew to arrive, I had the pleasure of sitting at the picnic table on the porch with a couple of the local loggers. One of them made the comment that he wished all he had to do was ride around all day on a big ol' motorcycle. I assured him I wished that that was all I had to do as well. I informed him I was on vacation, and he answered, "What's that?" As the rest of the bikes arrived the same guy remarked, "Would you look at that six different motorcycles and none of them are the same color." He was correct: we had just about every color of the rainbow.

After leaving Jo-Paul's and heading into Oklahoma, we progressed to Talihina, OK, where we were able to start the Talimena Trail on the Oklahoma end. If you ever ride the Talimena Trail from the Arkansas end and don't go all the way to the visitor center on the Oklahoma end, you are cheating yourself out of some very pretty scenery.

We rode the Trail to Queen Wilhelmina State Park where we stopped for some delicious home-made pie and a pin for our vests. While there, one of the riders asked how far it was to Mena, and was it down hill, indicating that he was running low on fuel.



After leaving Rich Mountain we did indeed stop in Mena and for fuel then, it was on to our next stop which was Mount Magazine State Park. The ride to Mount Magazine was very pretty, but it was nearing lunch time so the troops began to growl. I could sense a mutiny brewing so I asked the group if they would prefer to eat lunch in Booneville, AR, or to go on to the lodge at the mountain. The only response that I got was a vote for the lodge, so I announced that the lodge it would be. That was what I wanted to do anyway, but I was not going to impose my will on the group unless they gave me the chance to do so. The ride to the mountain was very pretty with views of the lodge sitting way up there on the bluff merely a teaser of things to come. When we reached the top, I guided the group to the lodge where we ate a very

tasty and affordable lunch. The view from the restaurant was magnificent. A trip to the gift shop yielded yet another pin for the vest.



From Mount Magazine we rode to Paris, AR, then East to Dardanelle. From Dardanelle we then rode to Mount Nebo. The signs on the way to Mount Nebo warn that trailers greater than twenty-four feet in length are prohibited. There is a reason for this. With only one way up and one way down the mountain, there are some very tight switch-backs. It was a lot of fun going through the turn although not everyone along for the ride would agree with me. Once at the top, we stopped at the Visitor's Center for a cold drink and another pin for the vest. While there, one of the other riders mentioned that he was going to get a pin and a patch as he would never be coming up here again.

While sitting on the back porch of the Visitor's Center he gave me a compliment for getting together such a good ride and said he had really enjoyed it. I informed him that it was not through, and that we had another mountain to go! While on the Southeast corner of the mountain, we could see a small summer storm approaching from the Southwest. We decided that it was time to get off the mountain and try to skirt this storm on our way to our next stop.



We left Mount Nebo and returned to Dardanelle for fuel before heading to our final destination of Pettit Jean Mountain State Park. The storm was still well to the West of us so we had no problems getting to Pettit Jean. Once at the mountain, we proceeded to Mather Lodge for something cold to drink and the last pin purchase of the day. Cedar Falls was almost completely dry so it was not very impressive for those in our group who were first time viewers.

After a brief rest, we headed off the East end of the mountain, but not before we stopped at Pettit Jean's gravesite and overlook. The storm that was previously to our West was now blowing through the valley north of the mountain on its way to Morrilton, AR. The wind was pretty stiff at this point and you could see bad weather on the way, so we only stayed here long enough to take one last picture. We made it off the mountain without getting wet and turned South at Oppelo, AR for our return trip. Once we got to the Junction of AR highway 9 and AR highway 5, the group split up and headed for the house.

By the time most of the riders got home, they had ridden in excess of 550 miles in one day, and crossed four mountains. It was a long day, but it was a very fun day and all involved expressed their pleasure in having participated.



Trip Route: Started at intersection of US 71 and US 70
North on 71 to AR 4 at Cove, AR
West on AR 4 into OK then on to US 259
North on US 259 to OK 63 at Talihina, OK
North from Talihina to OK 1 (Talimena Trail)
East on OK 1 to Queen Wilhelmina State Park, then on
to Mena, AR
North on US 71 to AR 23
East on AR 10 to AR 309
North on AR 309 across Mount Magazine State Park to P
Paris, AR
North AR 22
East on AR22 to Dardanelle, AR and AR 155
AR 155 to Mount Nebo State Park
AR 155 back to Dardanelle (remember I said that there
way up, and one way down)
At Dardanelle, South on AR 7 to AR 154
East on AR 154 across Pettit Jean State Park to AR 9
South on AR 9 to intersection of AR 5
Then Home

I hope you enjoy this ride as well as we did.