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Ozark Mountain Magic October 21-28, 2012



From the bottom of Blanchard Springs Cavern to the top of Tom Sauk Mountain, the Ozarks offer bubbling azure waters, woodlands ringing with birdsong, prairies painted with wildflowers, and country living blessed with crafts and mountain music.

The wonderful rugged geology of the Ozarks makes it an intriguing area with a wealth of natural history and cultural diversity. Many locals point out, quite correctly, "our mountains ain't much for height ... but our valleys are mighty deep." The typical Ozark "mountains" are mostly flat-topped hills undermined with caverns and separated by deep ravines. Hilltop vistas stretch out over thousands of wooded acres blanketed each fall by brilliant autumnal colors, dotted with occasional stately pines, cedars, and prairie openings known as glades.

Water is the artist that shapes the Ozarks' landscape, colors the culture, and adds a magical touch to all the places we explore on this tour. Valleys are lined with clear streams fed by cool flowing springs that – masterpieces both prized for their beauty and appreciated for their ability to generate commerce and cultural centers.



After meeting in St. Louis, we make our first stop at Meramec River State Park to get a sample of Ozark habitats. On our second day we head south to Arkansas visiting a couple of beautiful springs and admiring the beauty of one of the last stands of Shortleaf native pines – which were protected by a private forestry company!

The Ozarks are riddled with caves, and it is in these caverns where water has hewn and painted captivating masterpieces that seem to defy explanation. Missouri and Arkansas have more than 7,000 caves, and many have been developed as show caverns. Blanchard Springs Caverns is one of the finest and most amazing caves open for visitation. Owned, carefully developed and operated by the U. S. Forest Service, the beauty of this cave was preserved and artistically lighted while making its passages comfortably accessible.

Our time in Arkansas will also be devoted to exploring crafts and culture at the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, where we meet musicians, crafts people, and storytellers who spin colorful yarns. Often, all three skills are found in one, many-talented person! The Folk Center is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the Ozarks'



heritage in a lively manner. Fall is the traditional season to celebrate harvest – and when the Folk Center is the most alive with crafts and music.

We will return to Missouri, where our lodging and dining in Rockbridge overlooks a spring filled with trout (a popular menu item: fishing can be arranged), as well as the old mill that was the economic center of the local economy. We will explore other colorful mills in the area, search out more fall color, and visit a wildlife area where Aldo Leopold's son carried out research.



We move east to Eminence, a town built with proceeds of yesterday's timbering and maintained with canoe, fishing and tourism dollars. From our base here we visit; the historic Alley Springs Mill, which fostered a community that survived long past the days of the mill; Blue Spring, with deep, clear, azure waters; and beautiful Rocky Falls. We also take an opportunity to become part of the "W-ELK-OME Home" committee that is greeting the elk that are being reintroduced at the Missouri Department of Conservation's Peck Ranch.

On our final day in the Ozarks we investigate an ancient section of this region that was formed by the cooling and uplift of granite batholiths, intrusions of basalt, and volcanic eruptions. These molten beginnings were much more vigorous and complex than the sedimentary rocks found in previous locations. We visit some of the oldest exposed rocks in North America, including Elephant Rocks State Park – home to fascinating gigantic granite boulders that dominate the horizon like, well, a herd of elephants! In this same area, we'll explore Johnson Shut-Ins State Park, where short hikes reward us with exceptional views of both ancient stream "shut-ins" and contemporary sculpturing that water has carved into the land.

Years ago, the Center for Ozark Studies at Missouri State University created an audiovisual program called "Sassafras: An Ozarks Odyssey." It concluded by stating: "The Ozarks is a place, the Ozarks is a people. The people call the place home." Please join us to meet the place and the people on this new Naturalist Journeys trip!

ITINERARY

Sun., Oct. 21 Arrivals/Meramec State Park

Please plan your arrival at Lambert-Saint Louis International Airport before 2 pm. Once you arrive, make your way to the "Meeting Place" in the baggage claim area, on the lower level of Terminal 1, where we gather for our departure.

We stop at Meramec State Park, which is about an hour's drive from the airport, to give everyone a chance to stretch their legs and start becoming familiar with diverse habitats of the region. The Meramec River is a beautiful, stream-fed waterway that meanders its way through some of the most scenic environments in the Ozarks and this park provides a sample of many of these unique communities. The landscape features small springs and caves in steep forested hills with a mixture of Shortleaf pine (the only pine native to Missouri) and various hardwoods (including several species of oaks) interspersed with rocky outcroppings that host prairie communities. The name Meramec, derived from an Indian tribe that once inhabited the area, is believed to mean either "good fish" or "catfish".



Afterwards, we head to historic Salem Missouri for our welcome dinner and overnight accommodations. *Accommodations Holiday Inn Express, Salem, MO (D)*

Mon., Oct. 22 Scenic Route to Arkansas and Views of the Bottom of the Ozarks

This morning we head south to Mountain View, Arkansas and the Ozark Folk Center, the home base for our activities for today and tomorrow.

As we head south on Scenic Route 19, we stop to visit a stand of virgin pine and then Round Spring—both are short walks. The magnificent “Virgin Pines” is one of the few remaining stands of native shortleaf pines that escaped the clear-cutting frenzy of the timber barons. Today some of the trees tower 100 feet high and are over 200 years old. Over 6 million acres of the Ozarks were once covered by Shortleaf pine that provided lumber and employment for a few decades. These native pines are now reduced to less than ½ million acres, and this stand has been protected for years by Pioneer Forest, an exemplar sustainable forestry business which transferred its assets to the L.A.D. Foundation.



In the afternoon, we take an opportunity to see Ozark geology from the “bottom side” when we tour Blanchard Springs Caverns, the crown jewel of the USDA’s Ozark National Forest. This is a magnificent living cavern, with active cave formations, often referred to as “the place where Mother Nature met Father Time.” The US Forest Service did a remarkable job in developing accessible, well-light trails while carefully maintaining the cavern’s assets. If we are fortunate, we may get a glimpse of Ozark Blind Salamanders a rare species limited to the Ozarks. Back on the surface we can hike to Blanchard Springs to see where the water from the cavern finally reaches the surface.

Accommodations at the Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, AR (B,L,D)



Tues., Oct. 23 Cultural Heritage and Scenic Rivers

After a hearty breakfast, we explore the cultural heritage of the region at the Ozark Folk Center State Park. The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, in an early attempt to preserve the vanishing heritage of the Ozark Mountains, assisted local craftsmen and musicians to form the Ozark Foothills Crafts Guild in 1962. The guild started with 30 members and now consists of over 300 master craftsmen and musicians. Various Ozark crafts people are on hand during the day to demonstrate skills from soap making to blacksmithing and printing the old-fashioned way with handset type. We have time to meet and talk with people who have kept their cultural heritage alive and perhaps may find a selection of handcrafted gifts to take home.

In the afternoon we hike to some of the area’s scenic streams and waterfalls, including Sylamore Creek, designated as a National Scenic River. Birds we may find include Cooper’s Hawks, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees, Brown Thrashers and other species.

Accommodations at the Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, AR (B,L)

Wed., Oct. 24 Return to Missouri-Rock Bridge

This morning we’re up early for our departure back north to Missouri. We stop to stretch our legs at the Caney Mountain Conservation Area, which combines a rich conservation history with a diversity of unique habitats including Ozark “Glades,” savannahs, old growth forests and small streams. This area harbored some of Missouri’s last remaining wild turkeys when it was designated as a wildlife refuge in 1940.



The first conservation plan was developed by Starker Leopold, son of Aldo Leopold, who was the first professor of wildlife management.

Our hikes in the Caney Mountain Wildlife Area, include a short jaunt to Starker Leopold's cabin, along a creek, and one or two walks in the uplands among native short-leaf pine groves and oak-hickory forest. This area abounds in White-tailed Deer and Wild Turkeys. With luck we may see a covey of Bobwhite Quail (previously abundant throughout the Ozarks) and hear the hollow echo calls of Pileated Woodpeckers.



After lunch and checking into our accommodations, we take an afternoon drive to visit springs and historic mills, including the Aid-Hodgson Water Mill, one of the most colorful in the Ozarks. This handsome, three-story mill, with its adjacent millpond and waterfall, is fed by one of the state's larger springs. If we are lucky, on the river we may catch a glimpse of the rare Ozark Hellbender, a large ominous-looking salamander found only in these crystal clear waters (they have far-flung relatives in China).

Bluejays may cause a noisy commotion, and along the creek we may find some late migrant warblers and other songbirds. An alternate activity is fishing, which can be arranged this evening at Rock Bridge Trout Farm or tomorrow for those interested.

We end the day with a delightful dinner.

Accommodations at Rockbridge Rainbow Trout and Game Ranch (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 25 Views from the top of the Ozarks

After breakfast we check out and depart for some of the most scenic drives in the Missouri Ozarks. If our timing matches the fall leaf color, always a gamble, the mixed hardwood forests of the Ozarks rival any in North America.

Periodically, we stretch our legs with short hikes to an interesting mix of creeks, streams, glades, and scenic vistas. We especially enjoy hilltops where we can see long views from the top of the Ozark plateaus. We drive the Glade Top Trail Scenic Drive and hike out onto glade-topped hills (prairie patches with cedars)—these are easy hikes but the ground may be rocky. If weather is warm, we see splendid Collared Lizards with their turquoise backs spotted with yellow, and bright orange throat pouch. Blue-headed Vireos may be noisy here, and with long views we should catch sightings of raptors, including Bald Eagles arriving to spend the winter.

Accommodations at River's Edge, Eminence, MO (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 26 Springs, Mills, Waterfalls and Elk

Shannon County is one of the most scenic sections of the Ozarks and today we devote our energies to discovering springs where water wells up from the sedimentary rocks to provide the beauty, natural lifeblood and longevity of the region. These are soluble limestones and dolostones that are riddled with sinkholes and underground passageways (known as karst geology) carrying water that forms caverns and arrives at the surface as springs.

We plan to hike to various springs, some with scenic water mills and some undeveloped, to see the origins of many streams that provided the water and energy for the Native Americans and European settlers who came to the region.

First we explore Alley Spring and learn how this beautiful spring became the center of a community that continued even when the annual milling of wheat ended. Then we move east of town and hike to Blue Spring, about a 1.5 mile round



trip, which is famous for its azure waters. With a depth of 300 feet, it is Missouri's deepest known spring and sixth largest with an average daily flow rate of 90 million gallons.

Our next stop is a quick walk to admire Rocky Falls, a steep cascading waterfall that plunges into a nice pool and is a fine example of more resistant rock forming a "shut-in." The term "shut-in" refers to a place where the river's breadth is limited by hard rock that is resistant to erosion and this is a beautiful example of water working its magic.

After another short drive we enter the 23,000 acre Peck Ranch Conservation Area. Our first stop includes a hike into the Stegall Mountain Natural Area, which features a very interesting Rhyolite glade with open prairie patches and bare rocks that are also home to Collared lizards. In an operation dubbed "W-ELK-OME Home," elk are being reintroduced to Missouri at Peck Ranch and with luck we can welcome them back. Even if we don't see elk, we may hear the bugling as this is the rutting season.

Accommodations at River's Edge, Eminence, MO (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 27 Johnson Shut-ins State Park / Elephant Rocks State Park

After breakfast, we head northeast to see how the East Fork of the Black River reacted to a basaltic restriction in its channel—now known as Johnson Shut-ins State Park. Over the eons the river formed a spectacular gorge with cascades, potholes, pools and rapids to become one of the most scenic shut-ins in the state. We'll also see how the park has been totally rebuilt since the 2006 rupture of a power plant reservoir released more than a billion gallons of water that flash flooded the park destroying almost all facilities. Resident birds include Tufted Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches; Brown Creepers and Red-breasted Nuthatches arrive for the winter.



From Johnson Shut-ins we continue to Elephant Rocks State Park, one of the most curious geologic wonders we encounter on this trip. The central features in this park are the large, rounded pink granite boulders, "Elephant Rocks," that have eroded from cubes formed in a 1.5 billion year-old granite batholith; some of the oldest exposed rocks in North America. We will explore these wonderful forms and view the carvings left by quarry workers and the areas where large blocks were removed for buildings and tombstones. Soils here are thin and not fertile, so the gnarled oaks provide this park with an interesting forest that is much older than it first appears. Carolina Wrens and Rufous-sided Towhees will soon be joined by White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows arriving for winter. We conclude our trip with a farewell dinner in Farmington.

Accommodations at Holiday Inn Express, Farmington (B,L,D)



Sun., Oct. 28 Departures from Saint Louis

At 8:00 AM, we depart for Lambert-Saint Louis International Airport for flights after NOON.



PLAN AHEAD!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#) (formerly Access America).

Offset your [Carbon Footprint](#). Show us the receipt and we'll take 50% - up to \$50.00 - of your carbon offset fee off your final payment.

Your guides for the journey will be Ed and Sil Pembleton.

COST OF THE JOURNEY

Cost of the journey is \$1895.00 per person, based on double occupancy, from St. Louis, Missouri (STL). This cost includes: accommodations for 7 nights, most meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Single supplement is \$395.00.

Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from St. Louis, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services. With fewer than 6 participants, a small-group surcharge (typically \$100-200 per participant) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

Group Size: This is a sampler trip, maximum of 12 and minimum of 4 participants.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

The airport for this journey is St. Louis, Missouri (STL). Most major airlines serve St. Louis including Air Canada, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta, Continental, Frontier, US Airways and United. Plan on arriving in St. Louis no later than 2:00 PM on Oct. 21 and departing after NOON on Oct. 28. If you want to spend more time in St. Louis, we can make lodging recommendations.

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