

## Ozark Mountain Ride 2019

### Day 1

“Don’t know why it is but anytime I take a trip, it is always raining somewhere down the line”. Phil and I departed about 6:30 to miss the rain and the traffic on 620. We missed most of the traffic but the rain caught up with us before we got to Round Rock. It lasted less than an hour, so all’s well that ends well.

A kamikaze bird came in on me just outside of Taylor. Thought he was going to hit my windshield but he missed it. I thought he had escaped but found him 75 miles down the road with his guts spilled all over my engine. Too bad, but glad he did not hit the windshield. I was riding with a group into the interior of Mexico when one of the guys scared up a buzzard that was eating a cow on the side of the road (open grazing there). Well, buzzards cannot fly straight up as they are too heavy. They spread their wings and the wind lifts them, then they start to flap. Well, the buzzard got lifted sideways right in front of the motorcycle. The rider, who was hauling ass, did not go down, but the windshield was destroyed and the buzzard vomited up the food intended for her young all over the guy. He smelled so bad we made him ride a mile back for the balance of the trip.

Back to Texas, the first few towns past Round Rock are depressing. Taylor is bad but has a redeeming factor in that it has a by-pass....money well spent. The next town, Thorndale, gets the prize for the most deferred maintenance. Rockdale, just down the road, has a lot of falling down houses but the downtown is looking much better. Some movement is putting that downtown are back where it used to be and I am glad. I did think the name of their funeral home with an unseemingly name, Lucky Funeral Home.

The Shell station in Athens won unfriendly business of the day. It took 6 tries for the machine to accept my card and when it did there was no premium. Phil never got his pump to work. The gas pumped as slow as molasses. The cost was \$3 per gal. for regular gas....and the pump did not cut off. Gas flowed all over my motorcycle. Phil was exasperated and got gas at a different station.

The Railroad Café on main street somewhat redeemed Athens with really good food, though no beer!

As we do, we took a diversion to see a state park lake and got a little turned around on a pigs path that had serious pot holes.

Some had been repaired by someone who missed the asphalt pot hole class....so the repaired ones were more challenging than the ones not fixed. We turned around as an old guy puled up in an older pick up, cut his engine and lit a cigarette. He just stopped to look at us. Phil asked him where this lake was really entertaining to listen to. His Texas drawl was one of those the movie stars try to imitate but just cannot. It took him a long time to not tell us very much but he was over the top trying to be helpful and definitely was in no hurry to get anywhere.

Once checked in in Paris, we headed out to take photos of the Eiffel tower, all of 40 feet high. Never mind that the one in France is 13,000 feet. Oh well, we got it checked off!

Dinner at a Mexican place which had 4 stars where the reviews had to come from family members, and they had not alcohol. This was remediated by Nathans bar at room 225, we had happy hour, turned in early and planned to meet at 6 am for breakfast to have a long shot of avoiding heavy weather before our destination the following day.

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### Day 2

I texted an update to Susie from one of our 3rd forced storm stops yesterday. She responded, "well today it looks like it IS about the destination, NOT about the journey." She nailed it.

It had been shaping up this way on the radar maps from the week before. Tuesday was going to be the most challenging day. The night before, we scrapped the normal leisurely, scenic and longer winding path for the "get there the fastest way" route. During the day we scrapped multiple plans to work around the storm patterns.

Phil agreed to have our horses saddled and meet for a quick breakfast at 6 a.m. Phil took a quick look at the "hot" meal our Day's Inn offered, and passed. He is not big on skipping meals. I suspect he had held back one of Dorthie's muffins and made a cup of coffee in his room. She packed two extra for me too but I had eaten both of them for a late snack the night before. I have zero resistance to temptation when it comes to those things. I looked the FREE breakfast over, finding it unappetizing, at best. They had a pre-prepared omelet in a cellophane package that looked a lot like something Jasper throws up when he eats too much grass. They had oatmeal left over from WWII that looked better than anything else. I jammed down a few spoons of this and joined Phil who was staring at his phone radar app.

We shoved off in the dark in a light rain. Within 5 miles we saw the largest billboard size highway digital notification signs I have ever seen. "Warning Dangerous Thunderstorms All Day And Into The Night". Yea! It had not hit me yet, we had rain the day before. We had our rain gear on, so what?

It hit me at the first fuel stop in southern Oklahoma. We topped the tanks and Phil went into the convenience store. An old geezer about our age pulled up close with his pick up truck and said, "I hope you boys are headed north because it is very rough to the south". I looked and it was totally black with lots of lightening to the south.

I went in to caucus with Phil. I noticed the young lady attendant in a nervous discussion with what turned out to be her husband. He was giving her the local weather information. She hung up and said, "I'm calling my boss, cause I am going to shut this thang down and git out of here". She said there had

been a tornado spotted over a town 11 miles south of us and she was headed to someplace else.

Had we arrived a little later, there would be no gas available here and probably no where close. We were going to hit I-40 in only 10 miles, but that was not to happen any time soon.

We picked up the speed in a driving rain. We hit construction of the type where the concrete barriers form a very narrow path on a crooked and hilly part of the highway. There was not much room for error and the wind was pushing us around. This went on for about 10 miles with the lightning showing us the way. There was no way out, no options. We were locked into that path with no choice regardless of weather or road conditions. The semi behind us was likely getting a little upset as we slowed down to about 50 mph. This was the least fun of the trip so far.

At long last, the construction was over and a ramp presented itself that we did not pass up. We parked under an overhang in front of a convenience store/ gas station where the gas pumps had been long removed. The business next door was of interest to say the least, a mom and pop with the title, "I Smell Beacon". The radar showed solid red for 2 hours and we could not have found a better place to camp out.

It was about 2 hours later when the weather forced us to stop again, this time at a truck stop. Everyone we saw and talked to was on the same channel, watching the radar screen on a TV or an iPad or a phone. Everyone, for once, was on the same page. Folks driving from the east, Fort Smith, where we needed to go, said do not go that way.

Again, we rerouted after the heavy rain slowed down to just rain. We needed to end up north east so we picked a county road somewhat going north east, Oklahoma county road 100. There were multiple vertical storm fronts and all moving slowly eastward. We were between two of them. There were 21 tornados reported in northern Texas and eastern Oklahoma that day.

The route we chose was really pretty. The rain was not bad and mountains and lakes were very non-Oklahoma. The path was winding and narrow with no traffic and lots of lakes and rivers. The rivers were out of their banks but we had been seeing a lot of that the whole trip. We proceeded pretty much north

until we had to go east, where we knew there would be trouble. Trouble did not disappoint us. We were in the thick of it near a Mexican restaurant where we drank ourselves through it.

We arrived at our hotel nestled in the Ozarks a mile out of Eureka Springs, Arkansas about 5 p.m. With normal weather conditions the 6 a.m. departure would have put us here by 1 p.m. So, we had about 4 more hours of fun than we had planned.

A hot shower and an Uber to a place called Mom's in town made it all go away. The weather is supposed to be splendid the balance of the trip. We will see but for sure, it is unlikely to be worse than today!

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### Day 3

The difference between Day 3 and Day 2 would be the difference between lightening and a lighten bug. Day 3 could not have been a more serendipity, lazy, carefree relaxing day.

Our first treat was to ride a few miles out of town to visit the Thorncrown Chapel. You have to google it and look at this wonder of architecture. I have never seen anything like it. It sets on the side of a mountain and is a work of art.

Eureka Springs is a very old Victorian tourist town with all the buildings seemingly hanging off the side of a cliff of the beautiful Ozarks. There is very little new builds but the very old homes are in new condition. The streets meander up and down with nothing straight about them.

We had a late and lazy breakfast on the front porch of one of the old homes that had been converted to something of a deli. Phil struck up a conversation with a guy who was in the mortgage business but I think he regretted it. Phil could not get a word in as this guy was breathing through his ears. My back was to the guy so I have little knowledge of what was said but it was said. I just enjoyed the pleasant scenery and ignored the background droning on.

After breakfast we took the RED line trolley for \$6 to get a feel for this little mountain town.. We got off at the Crescent Hotel. Build in 1886 it is considered the Grand Ole Lady of Eureka Springs. All 6 stories are elegant and very Victorian. Huge old fireplaces and the original elevator with the clock looking thing showing what floor took us back in time. We had a beer on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor bar overlooking one of the valleys. It was breath taking.

We trolleyed back to our ppbikes and took the crooked path to Branson. Branson is a city turned into a Carnivel with lots of signs advertising singers who could not possibly still be alive. We walked up the street a half mile, ate very good Indian food and turned in early.

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### Day 4

We hit the trail on Day 4 at 6:30 a.m. as planned. I cannot speak for Phil, but I was glad to get out of Branson. It is sad what commercialization has done to a really lovely part of the world. To our credit, Phil nor I were the least bit tempted to the offerings of this carnival. I mean, Andy Williams was playing live right door! Really? He was old when I was young....do the math!

In minutes, that was all in our rearview mirror and we were blissfully cruising down the mountains with a sunrise to our left. The roads were delightfully crooked and unpredictable; the views were spectacular. This went on for most of a tank of gas, about 140 miles. We finally stopped for a cup of coffee and some planning about the day. The original plan was Shreveport, however we diverted, again. As we kicked around ideas, I looked at Phil and said, "I hate Shreveport". He said, "I hate Shreveport too". So, that was it for Shreveport.

The semi-final "Kind of Plan" was to hit it pretty hard in the general direction of Texarkana, where we would have another strategic planning session, but over a beer this time.

The Texarkana planning session produced pure unadulterated genius. Again, we had validated that strategic planning over beer trumps planning over coffee. We decided to divert to Jacksonville, Texas.

As background, last two years ago, I read an article in Texas Highways that featured a lady who, after working at a restaurant for 30 years, opened her own soul food restaurant. Within a month, she had folks standing in line. I got in touch with Phil, David, Alan, and Terry about taking a morning ride to eat soul food in Jacksonville. Not one of them questioned why we would ride 208 miles to eat lunch. This proved well worth the trip. Now back to today.

Yep, after being in the saddle 11 hours and after a shower, we were happily sitting at Sylva Mae's stuffing our faces with black eyed peas, fried catfish, cornbread, butter/bacon saluted cabbage, and mac-cheese to die for. Of course, Phil ordered both home made pie and home made cake.

We took a few pictures, waddled out to our bikes, and road the one mile back to our lodgings to take a nap.

Ozark Mountain Ride 2019  
Day 5  
The Highs and The Lows

The ride on Day 5 was short and uneventful. We rode 11 hours the day before so it would be an easy day. Phil did try to connect with an 80 year old gentleman in a convenience store where we stopped for gas. He offered him a ride on his Indian. He told him he had a ride, a 2004 Mercury Marquis, and he would be taking that. He was proud of that Mercury. We stopped for a cup of coffee in Rockdale, where Phil had a cookie that totally covered a normal size plate. Again, Phil tried to make conversation with a gentleman about as well dressed as I have ever seen anywhere. The old gentleman had a suit on and a felt Yankee hat, with highly polished wing tipped shoes. Phil complimented him on the hat, the man ignored him. Phil asked him if it was for sale; the man ignored him. That is about the most exciting things that happened on Day 5.

#### The Highs

There were a lot of highs, the trip was about the right distance and length of time on the road.

- There was an unplanned trip diversion of about 30 miles on Oklahoma state rode 100 that was about as scenic as it gets with lakes and rivers and winding mountain roads. We were dodging solid bright red on the red on the radar in Fort Smith, otherwise we would have missed this. It was raining on us but it was tolerable.
- Eureka Springs was delightful. Our hotel was perfect, the owners were the very best and the town was charming. The Thorncrown Chapel was beyond explaining in beauty, design and setting. The trolley ride around the town was a brilliant idea as was the beer on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Crescent Hotel.
- Once out of Branson, Hwy 65 cutting across the Ozarks in North East Arkansas was delightful. It was the first time we had much riding on the mountainous roads when it was dry and clear. That was a very nice tank of gas.
- Finally, we had some very good food. We were weathered in on Day 2 to a place called "I Smell Bacon" where we had a crazy breakfast. We had very good food at a place called Mom's place in Eureka Springs then the best of Indian dishes in Branson. Finally, and the top of the list, Syliva Mae's soul food in Jacksonville, Tx.
- High on my list is just the time Phil and I spend sharing stories and life lessons at breakfast and our happy hours after the days ride.

#### The Lows

- I did not enjoy riding between the concrete barriers for about 8 miles where it was dark in the morning hours of a Tuesday with known tornado sightings near us and the driving rain making visibility difficult at best.
- Branson did not bring much to the party once you get beyond the Indian food. We tried to cancel there once we saw Eureka Springs and probably should have taken a hit on the money spent on reservations and stayed another day there. The only thing good that came out of Branson was Hwy 12.

## High and Low

- It was a high to get my picture taken with Phil at the Eiffel Tower in Paris Texas but the tower itself was low at about 40 feet. The real tower in Paris is about 13,000 feet. I tried to make sense of it thinking that the per person feet might work out. There are 2 million people in Paris, France and only 24,000 in Paris, Texas but even at that the one in Texas would have to be 4000 feet. So, basically, the Eiffel Tower....is low.

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