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## Ozark Mountain Magic October 21-28, 2012

### Trip Report

Ed and Sil Pembleton, guides, with participants Marcia, Lynn, Pat, and Linda.

#### **Sunday, Oct. 21**

#### **Arrivals in St. Louis & An introduction to fall on the edge of the Ozarks**

Everyone arrived at St. Louis' Lambert International Airport and we headed to Meramec State Park for an introduction to the edge of the Ozarks and a taste of fall color. At the head of the hiking trail, we were greeted by a Black gum cloaked in a resplendently brilliant red leaf coat-reminiscent of a palace guard. Pileated Woodpeckers have left evidence of their presence and we heard them calling in the distance. Red-bellied and Downy woodpeckers were actively feeding. Our hike was a little longer than anticipated, so our welcome dinner in Salem moved to Norma's Mexican Restaurant, where we enjoyed great food and a warm welcome that continued past their normal closing time.



#### **Monday, Oct. 22**

#### **Fall in the Ozarks from Top to Bottom**

After leaving Salem, we stopped for a glorious view of fall color crowning the top of the Ozarks framed by the stand of virgin pines along State Highway 19 in Shannon County, Missouri. The verdant green of these virgin native Ozark short-leaved pines has been protected and sustained by Pioneer Forests, a private forestry company that has operated for more than 50 years on a sustainable yield basis.



Our view confirmed that, folklore to the contrary, fall color is stunning following an extreme summer's drought across the Ozarks. Knowing fall leaf color can soon disappear, we continued south, taking in as much as we could before leaf fall.

By late afternoon we moved south from the top of the Ozarks in Missouri to the Blanchard Springs Caverns and the underground supporting the Ozarks in Arkansas.

We entered the only cave managed by the US Forest Service and experienced equally magical surroundings on the Dripstone trail in Blanchard Caverns.



Described as the place where “Mother Nature met Father Time,” our U. S. Forest service guide kept reminding us that it’s a place where “a lot of water took a very long time” to create the magic before our eyes. These cave formations are absolutely stunning and many are very, very old.



This environment gives new meaning to awe and assisted by the dark spaces, it sparks the imagination to fantasize about and perhaps conjure up names for many of the formations. Some, like the Battleship, obviously fit their monikers, while others require more fantasy and perhaps more time alone in the dark.



We finished our evening at the Ozark Folk Center’s Skillet Restaurant with meals that sampled regional foods including collard greens, fried okra, pinto beans and ham, chicken dumpling soup, biscuits with molasses and other Ozark favorites.

**Tuesday, Oct. 23**

**The Ozark Folk Center, preserving culture and uniting people**

Today was devoted to touring the Ozark Folk Center’s craft village, where people practice and maintain the skills that made it possible to maintain a community in these hills and hollers. An Eastern Phoebe greeted us as we departed our cabins and headed to the Folk Center.



Our first encounter was with a woodworker who specializes in making tops with a foot-powered lathe. In addition to being a skilled craftsman who has an encyclopedic knowledge of woods, he provides a nice line of humor when he explains his work.

Humor seems to be a constant in these parts. Some of the practicing crafts people exhibit humor in things as simple as their “door bell,” and stopping in to observe them at work usually leads to learning

something new.







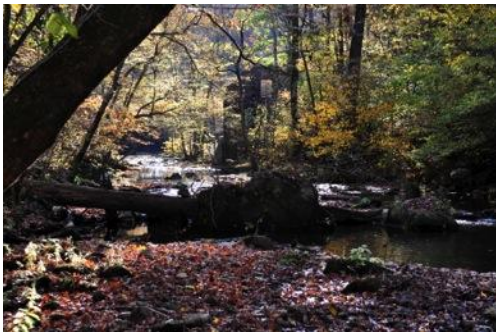
Sometimes, it is the unexpected—the gunsmith does not just tell you the origin of “a flash in the pan,” he gets out his flintlock, fills the pan with black powder and demonstrates that a flash in the pan really means, “you forgot to load the rifle with ammunition.” More than once for a slow photographer!

Music starts cascading across the Folk Center just before lunch and we joined in to hear a few classic folk tunes. Thanks to efforts by the Center this traditional music continues to be handed down as a family tradition here and all across the Ozarks.



The basket weaver was in her shop and with deft movements she began a new basket just as we arrived. She was almost, but not quite, finished by lunch. Not to worry; her finished products, and a lot of other items, are available in the center’s gift shop.

A persimmon tree on the way to lunch offered fruit for a little snack. If you choose the ripe ones they are tasty; if not, you pucker up quickly. In this case, ripe and tasty may be an acquired definition.



After lunch, we split into two groups—one for a shopping hike in downtown Mountain Home and one for a nature hike down along the branch below the site where Blanchard Springs emerges from the cave. The clear water stream provided a constant sound track and we



discovered that Witch hazel trees are discreetly blooming, with both leaves and flowers adding a pale yellow to the palette of fall colors. A couple of hours spent stretching our legs and enjoying the refreshing offerings of an Ozark stream made for a memory that will be long savored.



We regrouped at the Folk Center for dinner. After such a large lunch, we opted for quick desserts—it’s a good excuse to eat pie and apple dumplings and skip our vegetables. Once finished we headed to the Folk Center’s music theater for a two-hour concert. Music holds a special place in the culture, minds and hearts of Ozark people and concerts here feature national, regional and local players.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Jimmy Driftwood (mostly remembered for his song, *Battle of New Orleans*), classic folk music has been kept alive and well here. Tonight's concert highlighted performances by local musicians from several generations. Of course music inspired dances and local square dancers show their skills. At times, enthusiastic audience members joined the musicians on stage and danced to lively tunes.



**Wed., Oct. 24**

**Back To Missouri--Conservation and sustainable living in the Ozarks**

We checked out of our rooms at the Folk Center and had breakfast at a local café on the square in Mountain Home. This is the locals' favorite for breakfast. Almost all the tables were full, but they made a place for our group of six and welcomed us to their morning social time with friendly inquiries and invitations to see local attractions. When the tasty meals promptly arrived we knew why this place is popular. We departed in a volley of friendly farewells.



We headed back north into Missouri and learned that the last few warm, dry and slightly windy days have desiccated and hastened leaf fall. The question arises, "Are these sad days for a tree, or are they relieved?" We arrived at the Missouri Department of Conservation's Caney Mountain conservation area. Our first stop was at the cabin Starker Leopold, Aldo Leopold's oldest son, utilized when he was guiding the reintroduction of wild turkeys in Missouri. As if to punctuate the idea that restoration of wildlife works, wild turkeys made an appearance along a field that borders the road.



We learned that fall color was still hanging on as we drove up onto the ridge—especially on the north-facing slopes, which remained moist and cooler because they receive indirect light. Fall in the Ozarks is a complex change that demonstrates the many "micro habitats" that compose the mosaic of forest habitats here. We stopped at the "East Vista" for a picnic lunch enhanced by a wonderful view and great fudge for dessert.

By mid-afternoon we departed Caney Mountain and headed to the



Rockbridge Rainbow Trout Ranch, where we checked into our rooms and enjoyed free time to hike, explore, or enjoy some refreshment at the scenic old mill and watch anglers attempt to fool the local fish in the pool below the mill pond





dam. This is a place where conservation and management of wildlife for hunting and fishing has built a sustainable business. Pairs of Kingfishers patrolled the spring and the stream below the mill. A River Otter swam along the base of the dam, with a meal in its mouth and disappeared into a burrow near the mill. Figuring that meal was a trout, we did not mention it to the anglers.

At 5 pm we departed for a scenic drive to see the Aid-Hodgson Mill, one of the most famous mills in the Ozarks. The mill has recently been restored and has suffered several flooding incidents since that time as noted by the high water marks up on the porch—a good 12-15 feet above the ground.



The spring issuing from under the mill gives an appealing setting and implies fresh pure water. Gathering gallon jugs of drinking water from this mill spring has been a tradition here for centuries. When it was demonstrated and publicized that much of the water from the spring actually started at a sinkhole that was being used as a trash dump approximately 15 miles away near the town of Dora, the dumping stopped without any kind of enforcement. People here love their springs.



We returned to the restaurant at Rockbridge and most everyone chose the trout almandine for dinner. One trout lover spared the fish and opted for pork chops instead. In the end, we were all more than satiated with delicious meals and wonderful desserts.

**Thursday, Oct. 25**

**Glade Top Trail and a chicken?**

Morning sun set a dogwood ablaze as we went to breakfast, where we discover that smoked trout omelets were featured on the menu. The trout lover chose a grilled cinnamon roll, saving another fish, and we all saw how great that item is too. Another meal featuring trout, or cinnamon rolls for that matter, would be wonderful, but we had an itinerary and places to explore, so we departed for the Glade Top Trail in Mark Twain National Forest.



The summer drought has severely limited growth of the grasses and flowering plants on the prairie glades, leaving more of a desert landscape look to the place. We searched under flat rocks for Collared Lizards to show the group but failed to find even one. Early fall rain has allowed some prairie plants, especially



composites like Resin weed, to bloom later than normal, adding a dash of yellow to the brown prairie landscape in the background.

We stopped at a scenic overlook to stretch our legs and admire the view, when much to our surprise a bird not found on our checklist approached from the shrubbery. He was a good-looking rooster, far from any residence. He seemed well fed and confidently investigated us for what we may have to offer in the way of a handout.



The last few days of warm, sunny weather have caused even more leaves to fall, but on the south and west-facing hillsides the oaks maintain wonderful hues of golden brown and on the more moist and shaded north-facing hillsides the maples maintain their glorious reds and gold.

We turned east toward Eminence where we would spend the night and decided that we could delay our lunch after such a generous breakfast. Two hours later we stopped at the historic Dawt Mill on Bryant creek to enjoy snacks, topped off with the fudge that remained from yesterday. The flow in Bryant creek was very low, reflecting the summer's drought, and gave us an opportunity to explore the gravel bars. Clouds began to build, indicating that we may enjoy an evening rain, and several stream worn rocks from the gravel bar joined us as we moved on east.



We arrived at the Missouri Department of Conservation Twin Pines Conservation Education Center, and spent an hour exploring the natural and logging history of this part of the Ozarks. When we investigated the native Ozark shortleaf pines, we could easily determine the origin of the center's name, and assume that they are twin trees because of their unique ability (for pines) to sprout from rootstock. Carolina chickadees and Tufted titmice came and went to the feeder.

Clouds continued to increase, so we headed to Eminence and our lodging at River's Edge Resort, situated on the edge of the Jacks Fork

River—the southern fork of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The frontal system arrived while we were eating dinner, delivering

much needed rainfall with

only a bit of lightning and thunder

announcing the event, and then took a break when we returned to our resort.





Lynn was up early and returned with a surprise from a birding trek along the Jacks Fork River gravel bars in front of our lodging. She had not only found, but also photographed, a Sora Rail on the gravel bar! It was a chilly and cloudy morning following last night's rainfall, but the moisture was so welcome that we overlooked any minor discomforts and headed east to Aley Spring. The old mill and beautiful spring are nearly all that remains of what was once a vibrant community built up around the annual grinding of grains into flour. Until recently, commerce in the Ozarks never seemed to support malls, but they sure maintained a lot of mills.



The day began to turn sunny as we headed east, back through Eminence, and made our way out to Blue Spring. This spring derives its color and its name from the depth of its clear waters. At an average flow of 90 million gallons per day, it ranks as Missouri's 6<sup>th</sup> largest spring, but it is the deepest in the state at 310 feet—deep enough to totally submerge the Statue of Liberty!

Cool weather gave us the idea for an indoor picnic and then we headed north to round out our list of springs for the day with a visit to the appropriately named Round Spring. A classic spring, it became one of Missouri's first state parks in 1924, and was made part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways forty years later in recognition of its uniqueness.



Traveling south, we visited an area known as Rocky Falls, where the Earth's



ancient past provides a current day phenomenon. Here the stream forms a waterfall, because a layer of very hard and erosion resistant rock known as rhyolite constricts it. The rhyolite was formed over one billion years ago from a molten magma that pushed upward. Now because of its greater resistance it forms a low dam and waterfall in the streambed, which is mostly softer sedimentary limestone.

This is a warm up for later locations known as shut-ins. As we walked along the stream below Rocky Falls, we found our first Eastern Towhee energetically scratching and throwing leaves on the gravel bar. A few Song sparrows flitted through the underbrush as we returned to the car and a Brown Thrasher crossed the road as we headed toward our next stop at Peck Ranch Conservation area.

At Peck Ranch we visited the Stegall Mountain rhyolite glade, a state scientific/natural area. This glade, based on the hard and erosion resistant rhyolite, is a mixture of lichen covered or bare stone, prairie grasses and flowers and stunted trees. After a refreshing rainfall it looks like a rock garden, but it is clear that surviving in this habitat is not even a question for organisms lacking lots of ways to cope with difficult desert-like climates. This is a great place to find the elusive Greater Roadrunner, but like Wiley E. Coyote we were unsuccessful today.



After our hike at Stegall, we drove the Peck Ranch Elk tour route that circles through a portion of the 23,000 acre conservation area to see if we would be fortunate enough to find some of the Elk that have been reintroduced in the last three years. Like the Greater Roadrunner the Elk remained out of view, but we did spot several Wild turkeys and White-tailed deer before leaving for dinner.

**Saturday, Oct. 27**

**Shut-ins, catastrophic floods and elephants!**

After breakfast and saying goodbye to our hosts at River's Edge, we headed northeast to one of the jewels in the Missouri State Park system, Johnson Shut-ins. This is a world-class example of "shut-ins" geology, where a more resistant rock (rhyolite in this case) constricts the channel and the Black River rushes back and forth with great energy to find a way through the maze of smaller channels. The continual exertion of water against rock adds an air of excitement to a place, where the encounter has been continuing for eons. One has to be there to really feel the energy.



We also got to witness the effects of a more recent anthropogenic geologic event. Long known for its beauty and recreational opportunities, this area suffered a catastrophic flood in 2005 when the dam holding back Tom Sauk reservoir failed and sent 1.3

**BILLION** Gallons of water racing down Proffit Mountain and through the park—in 12 minutes! Fortunately no lives were lost, but the changes wrought by this torrent are impressive. The flush of water ripped away large granite boulders on the hillside and carried them down into the park on

the flood plain surrounding the river. We could not imagine the sounds of this onslaught as it ripped through the park at 5 am on that dark December morning. One would never want to be there to experience the energy.

After a stop for lunch we traveled a short distance to another of the Missouri State Park gems, Elephant Rocks. Here granite provides the geologic basis of elephant



shaped boulders that seem hand carved and just invite people of all ages and



abilities to hike the mile-long paved trail, climb the boulders and enjoy all that this amazing park has to offer.



Even if you do not know that the ancient boulders (1.36 billion years old) started as a granitic magma that cooled into cubes that eventually rose to the Earth's surface and then eroded into "elephants" in a very peculiar manner, this is a place to just enjoy the work of that erosion.

The trees here are challenged to find soil and struggle to grow in cracks and crannies. We noticed White-breasted Nuthatches scaling down the tree trunks and then discovered two oaks damaged by lightening during Thursday night's storms. One lost a ten-foot splinter that was ripped from its trunk and stuck into the soil like a spear. Life is not easy for trees here.



It's also a place to enjoy the work of people on granite—here history was literally carved into stone as quarry men left their signatures when they became certified. We investigated several of these signatures and wondered what life was like in the quarries.

Finally, Elephant Rocks provided the place for one last group photo before we departed to our lodging in Farmington and our delicious farewell dinner at 12 West Bar and Grill downtown on the square.



**Sunday, Oct. 28**

**Farewells in St. Louis**

Everyone was up early this morning. It was clear and still cool, which means good flying weather here while further east there is a potential for hurricane weather to block flights. We made the drive back to Lambert International in St. Louis with plenty of time to say our farewells and catch planes home. Later in the day reports indicate that everyone arrived on time.