

Riding an Ozarks Icon..



Arkansas 23 and the renowned Pig Trail

Switchbacks like this one put the sequel in the Pig Trail portion of AR 23. The 24-mile long nationally-known road is composed of switchbacks, hairpins, and other knee-dragging curves, mostly covered by a thick canopy of trees making for a ride akin to motoring through lush tunnels of foliage.

Maps! I love maps. I love exploring where I've been and where I'm going next. I don't always believe maps, though. Here's what I mean about those dots alongside a road on the map that signify scenic highways: they are often wrong. Take AR 23. Nowhere on the Arkansas Highway Map does it earn a single 'scenic dot' designation. But according to my definition AR 23 is one fantastic road... with or without those dots.

Is your definition of a really great road similar to mine?

Do you like knee-dragging hairpin curves and switchbacks? If so, AR 23 has them.

Do you want undulating sweepers, letting you heel your bike to the left, then the right, then back again? If you answered "yes" then Ark. 23 has them in abundance.

What about great scenic vistas or lush tunnels of foliage hanging over the roadway? AR 23 has both.

Without equivocation I can say that Ark. 23 has more of what most riders want, all rolled into one bold and brash stretch of asphalt. Over the years, various driving and car magazines have named AR 23 as one of the top ten driving roads anywhere in the United States.

AR 23 stretches 133 miles from US 71 – between Mansfield and Waldron on the southern end – to the Arkansas/Missouri border at the north end. The entire length of the highway is a wonderful ride and will take you through a wide variety of terrain.

The town of Ozark sits on the banks of the Arkansas River, at the top of a big bend of the river which French explorers called the Aux Arc – the Big Bend. The Aux Arc of the mighty river was closely associated with the mountains to the north, which eventually began to be known by the English mispronunciation of the 'Aux Arc' – the Ozark Mountains we all love.

AR 23 crosses the Arkansas River at Ozark on a beautiful, classic bridge from a time when Arkansas bridges were as decorative as they were functional.

North out of Ozark, AR 23 begins its climb into the Ozark Mountains.

Arguably one of the best monikers attached to any highway in the U.S. is the 24-mile-long "Pig Trail." Many folks often inaccurately refer to the entire length of AR 23 north of Ozark as the Pig Trail. That's OK, and perhaps it's a natural assumption. But officially the Pig Trail begins at the town of Ozark and ends up at the community of Brashears – little more than wide spot on the map at the junction of AR 23 and AR 16.

There are two possible reasons why this unique name was attached to this part of AR 23. Both are plausible and both equally as fascinating.

The first version of the legend is that the road is as twisty as a razorback hog's corkscrew tail, or that perhaps it was a path made by wild razorback hogs as they ambled along the ridges and down into the valleys of the area.



AR 23 and AR 16 intersect and run along together for a few miles. AR 16 is a lightly-traveled high road across the backbone of the Ozarks.



Even larger cruisers have fun on AR 23. From Ozark to the Missouri border is very scenic.



Here's a riding buddy from Oklahoma standing at the southern terminus of the Pig Trail Scenic Byway. These Forest Service signs are great photo-ops.

The second is that the road, once a popular back-roads route to University of Arkansas Razorback football games in Fayetteville, earned the name "Pig Trail" because of its association with the UA Razorbacks football team. The road was an alternative to taking US 71 from Alma to Fayetteville. It was a dangerous road... also very twisty ... and besides bikes and cars, it was populated by 18-wheelers trekking north with their heavy loads. Those trucks were equally problematic going up – very slowly – or coming down the steep roads, often at breakneck speeds with severely overheated brakes. So the Pig Trail was a popular option.

In the last two decades the Pig Trail section of AR 23 in particular and all of the highway in general, has become one of the nation's absolute best roads for motorcycles and sports cars alike.

Riding north from I-40 the Pig Trail begins its climb up into the Ozarks. Don't get too relaxed by how AR 23 begins because it soon begins to look like a twisted garden hose. It continues up over a series of ridges and down into the Mulberry River Valley, to a popular rest area and gas stop/convenience store called the Turners Bend store.

A few miles up the road, past tiny Cass, the Pig Trail once again earns its reputation with runs through dense tunnels of trees and lush foliage... and wraith-like, knee-dragging switchbacks and curves.

When you reach Brashears don't let the exhilaration of having successfully navigated The Pig Trail lull you to sleep. AR 23 rolls on north through great scenery and excellent riding. It's a serpentine and twisty ride on to Huntsville, then all the way up north to Eureka Springs and the Missouri state line.

Huntsville is a nice place to stretch your legs and take a break. There are services where you can gas up and get a snack as well as some great places to eat. Further north of Huntsville on AR 23 you'll find Eureka Springs, which is a well known place to spend the night and chow down relax after a full day cruising on the Ozarks' top road.

AR 23 runs from the Missouri border south 90 miles to Ozark at I-40. The 44 miles from Ozark south to US 71 is through mostly farmland, dotted with stands of timber, for a total of 134 miles. So enjoy the all of AR 23, but take special revelry on 'The Pig Trail.'

CTO



A solo rider headed south on AR 23, having almost completed his ride to Ozark on I-40.



The heart of the Pig Trail is like this... twists and turns snaking through foliage tunnels. Knee-dragging curves are 'de rigueur' on this classic stretch of AR 23's The Pig Trail.

AR 23 runs through Eureka Springs on up north to the Missouri border.