

PART I OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The Talimena Scenic drive winds 54 miles along the crest of Rich Mountain and Winding Stair Mountain in the Ouachita National Forest (pronounced Wash-i-tah). If you can resist stopping to enjoy the many vistas and attractions along the way, the route takes 1 hour and 10 minutes to drive. A leisurely drive can take all day.

Along the drive are several historic sites and numerous turnouts with panoramic vistas. Many of the sites have exhibits that explain the natural and historical significance of the area. Learn about the prehistoric Caddoan people, early settlers of Rich Mountain, the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Choctaw Nation (tribe) in Indian Territory. Discover interesting facts about the natural environment while absorbing the beauty of shortleaf pine and hardwood forests.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The first part of this guide provides general information about the area and the route. The second section is organized as a stop-by-stop auto tour.

The auto tour is organized front to back to begin from the west end of the drive at the junction of Oklahoma Highway 1 and U.S. Highway 271. If you enter the drive from another point, turn to the map on page 28-29 and find your location. Each stop along the drive has the coinciding page number following its name on the legend. Facilities available to the visitor are identified by a symbol with each site narrative.

FROM THE WEST (OKLAHOMA)

. U.S. HIGHWAY 271 INTERSECTS Oklahoma Highway 1. The Talimena Scenic Drive, at the West End Visitor Information Station, 7 miles northeast of Talihina, Oklahoma or 30 miles southwest of Poteau, Oklahoma.

. U.S. HIGHWAY 259 intersects the halfway point of the Talimena scenic Drive 5 miles north of Big Cedar, Oklahoma, and 18 miles south of Heavener, Oklahoma.

FROM THE EAST (ARKANSAS)

. ARKANSAS HIGHWAY 88 intersects U.S. Highway 59/71 in the town of Mena. The Talimena Scenic drive begins at the East End Visitor Information Station north of town.

. ARKANSAS HIGHWAY 272 intersects U.S. Highway 270/59 at the town of Rich Mountain, 8 miles north west of the town of Acorn, Arkansas. This highway goes directly to Queen Wilhelmina State Park.

TRAVEL TIPS

- . Make sure you have plenty of gas before you begin. There are no gasoline stations on the drive.
- . Before you enter the drive, pack a picnic lunch or take along snacks. Vending machines, located at the West End Visitor Information Station, and the restaurant at the Queen Wilhelmina Lodge, offer food and drink.
- . Check weather conditions on the drive before leaving. Ice and fog can be a challenge on the drive even when they are not a problem on lower roads.
- . Visit the East End or West End Visitor Information Stations. These stations are staffed from springtime through fall. They offer area information, brochures and have unique educational materials for sale.
- . Take water with you to drink. Most of the stops along the way do not provide drinking water. Water from streams or springs, although they may run clear, may not be safe to drink.
- . Light jackets are appropriate for windy days, or for fall, winter and spring outings.
- . If you plan to hike, wear comfortable shoes.
- . On most days, photo opportunities are numerous. Take along extra film.
- . During the late spring, summer, and early fall you may want to take insect repellent if you plan to enjoy the trails.
- . Restrooms are located at all Ranger stations, West End VIS (Visitor Information Station), Old Military Road, Horse Thief Spring, Wind Stair Recreation Area, Pipe Spring, Kerr Arboretum and Nature Center, Queen Wilhelmina State Park, Rich Mountain Fire Tower, East End VIS (Visitor Information Station).

ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY THE AREA

HIGH CLEARANCE VEHICLE, 4-WHEEL DRIVE, SPORT UTILITY VEHICLE – The following roads are not paved and can be washed out after storms. The roads are rough and rocky in spots. A spare tire is a must.

- . Forest service (F>S>) Road 6010 – north to Holson Valley Rd., South to Highway 63.
- . F.S. Road 6022 – to Billy Creek.
- . F.S. Road 6014 – to Cedar Lake.
- . F.S. Road 6007 – to Highway 270/59.
- . F.S. Road 6029 – to Pipe Spring.
- . F.S. Road 6068 - to Highway 259.
- . F.S. Road 514 - to Mountain Fork on Highway 8.

TRAILS – Ouachita National Recreation Trail, the Queen Wilhelmina State Park trails, the interpretive trails at the Kerr Arboretum and the Orchard Trail at the East End Visitor Information Station are **restricted to foot travel**.

Trails with shared uses include Billy Creek, Horse Thief spring, Old Military, Boardstand, Kerr Nature Center, and Earthquake Ridge Trail Complex. Information sheets with maps are available at Ranger and Visitor Information Stations. Several detailed publications are available for sale at retail outlets operated at the Visitor Information Stations.

HORSEBACK – The Winding Stair Equestrian Trails and Cedar Lake Recreation Area Equestrian Camp are just south of Heavener, Oklahoma. Camping facilities are available to horseback riders year round.

MOUNTAIN BIKES – The Earthquake Ridge Trail complex and Forest Service roads offer opportunities for mountain bike enthusiasts. Bikes are allowed on the Winding Stair Equestrian Trails and Horse Thief Spring Trail, however horses have the right of way.

WIND STAIR MOUNTAIN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA – OKLAHOMA

In October 1988, the United States Congress passed a bill that established the Winding Stair Mountain National Recreation and Wilderness Area. This included more than 97,000 acres in LeFlore County, Oklahoma, and authorized \$15 million for tourism and recreation improvements and developments. Special management areas were established including.

- . Black Fork Mountain Wilderness Area
- . Upper Kiamichi River Wilderness Area
- . Robert S. Kerr Memorial Arboretum and Natural center and Botanical Area
- . Beech Creek Botanical Area
- . Indian Nations National Scenic and Wildlife Area
- . Beech creek National Scenic Area

THE TALIMENA SCENIC DRIVE

The most popular form of outdoor recreation in your national forests is driving for pleasure. Millions of visitors each year take advantage of this opportunity in the 156 national forests across 44 states. The USDA Forest service responds to the public's request by establishing the National forest Scenic Byway Program in May 1988.³ This program promotes and recognizes highways in national forests with outstanding scenery and historical significance.

The Talimena Scenic Drive is in the western part of the Ouachita Mountains, on the Arkansas and Oklahoma boundary. One of the first National forest Scenic Byways, the drive was designated in February 1989. Located between the city limits of Mena (Polk County), Arkansas, and a point of U.S. Highway 271 just north of Tahihina (LeFlore County), Oklahoma, the entire drive is within the Ouachita National forest.

The Oklahoma and Arkansas Highway departments constructed Talimena Scenic Drive with federal public highway funds beginning in 1964 and completing the project in 1969. The route followed and connected two truck trails that were originally built and maintained by Civilian Conservation corps (CCC) enrollees in the 1930s. The Oklahoma and Arkansas highway departments' local maintenance forces at Mena and Tahihina now maintain the scenic highway.

THE OUACHITA MOUNTAINS

The Ouachita Mountains extend 186 miles east and west, between Little Rock (pinnacle Mountain), Arkansas, and Atoka, Oklahoma. Lying south of the Arkansas south of the Arkansas River and the Ozark Mountains, the Ouachitas include Mount Magazine, Petit Jean, Nebo Mountain, the Fourche (pronounced Foosh) Range, the Cossatot Range, Black Fork Mountain, Jackfork Mountain and the Potato Hills. Rich Mountain and Winding Stair Mountain are among the highest points in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

The Ouachitas are composed mostly of sandstone and shale. The mountains have been thrust up as a result of extreme lateral pressure that caused tight folding and faulting. The mountain building processes ceased long ago, allowing erosional forces to whittle these mountains to about one-third of their original height.

Sever geologic faults are located along the Talimena Scenic Drive. The winding Stair fault extends along the lower south face of Rich Mountain. The Honess Fault forms the valley of Big Creek between Rich Mountain and Black Fork Mountain. Briery creek follows Briery Fault to the north of Black Fork Mountain, then the fault cuts diagonally between the west end of Rich Mountain and Spring and Honess Mountains, dissecting the Robert S. Kerr Arboretum tract.

Along the drive you may notice rivers of rock, known as rock glaciers. These are not true "glaciers" because there is no ice within their structure. Many geologists believe that long ago when the climate was much cooler and the mountains were much higher in elevations, these rock flows may have had ice cores. Several may be seen on the south slope of Black Fork Mountain and along the roadside between the intersection of Highway 259 and Kerr Natural Center. See page 48-49 in the auto tour section for more information on rock glaciers.

THE WATERS

The Winding Stair and Rich Mountains give birth to numerous streams which serve as tributaries for several major rivers in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Runoff from Rich mountain feed the Kiamichi, the Little, and the Ouachita Rivers. Streams beginning on Winding Stair Mountain feed the Poteau and the Kiamichi Rivers.

The Talimena Scenic Drive straddles a geographic “divide”, a line or geographic zone separating the flow of water. Water falls on the north side of the drive is collected in streams that eventually flow into the Arkansas River or the Ouachita River. Water that falls on the south side of the drive flows to the Red River, which forms the boundary between Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. All of the water that fall on these mountains are reunited in the Mississippi River. Divides and water flows are also discussed on pages 51 and 55 in the auto tour section of this book.

During the 1900s, a number of lake and reservoirs were built on area streams. The Army Corps of Engineers developed Lake Wister and the Broken Bow Reservoir to control flooding. Cedar Lake was developed by the Forest Service in the 930s and Lake Wilhelmina was developed by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for recreation purposes.

Fish caught from these streams and lakes include smallmouth, largemouth, spotted and rock bass, green sunfish, walleye, chain pickerel, channel catfish, and trout below the Broken Bow Lake Dam and along the Mountain Fork River.

Western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma have a distinctive group of nongame, native fish. Twenty-seven species are considered to be inhabitants of the streams, creeks, and rivers. Included amount them are the stoneroller, golden shiner, redbfin shiner, steelcolor shiner, freckled madtom, spotted sucker, channel darter, bluntnose darter, dusky darter, and orangethroat darter

PLANT LIFE

The Ouachita Mountains were at one time a westward extension of the Appalachians. Therefore the plants of the Ouachita National Forest are similar to the eastern deciduous forest. Both geographically and climatically, the area may be considered a meeting ground of several biomes or plant formation. These include plants which can be found in the northwest U.S., the southwest U.S., the Gulf Coastal Plain and the Gulf Costal Highlands, and the prairie states.

The Ouachita Mountains are different from most mountain ranges. The ridge line run predominantly east-west rather than north-south. The east-west directional trend gives rise to distinct north slope and south slope plant and animal communities.

South slopes are occupied by shortleaf pines in almost pure stands or in mixed pine-hardwood forests. Common hardwood trees occupying the southern exposures are post oak, blackjack oak, black oak, southern red oak (at lower elevations), black hickory, and winged elm, with an understory of serviceberry, wild plum and fringe tree.

Trees near the mountain crests are dwarfed and gnarled due to the constant pressure from prevailing south winds and the effect of winter icing from frequent freezing fogs, mist and rain.

Dominant trees on the north slopes include white oak, northern red oak, mockernut hickory, bitternut, black walnut, black locust, basswood, sugar maple, red maple, and at lower levels, beech. Understory trees include dogwood, pawpaw, Carolina silverbell,

American bladdernut, umbrella magnolia, Ohio buckeye, redbud and wild hydrangea. The north slopes, in particular, are an extremely rich habitat for spring wildflowers.

On the north slopes the soil is extremely rich, dark, and moist. Rich Mountain derived its name from the unusually rich soil. One story says that the mountain was at one time the roosting place of vast numbers of passenger pigeons; their droppings contributing to the fertility of the soil.

WILDLIFE

The Ouachita Mountains abound in a wide variety of wildlife, including game and non-game species. The name "Ouachita" is derived from an Indian word meaning "good hunting". Many tribes used these mountains as seasonal hunting grounds and today the Ouachita National Forest, including the area around the Talimena Scenic Drive, provide valuable hunting opportunities to the public. Deer, turkey, bear, quail, fox, and gray squirrels, black bass, crappie, and bluegill are major game species native to the area. Non-game species are considered and protected by forest managers as well.

Along the north slopes of Rich and Winding Stair Mountains are many rocky areas with deep pockets of leaf-mold and many fallen logs in an advanced state of decay. These form ideal habitat for two amphibians unique to the area: the Rich Mountain salamander and the Ouachita Mountain redback salamander.

Bird life is abundant along the drive, especially the soaring birds. Golden eagles are active in winter and spring; turkey vultures and a few black vultures are permanent residents; and red-tailed and red shouldered hawks are year round residents of the Ouachita National Forest but are especially noticeable on the drive during migrating periods. Strong updrafts and turbulence above the mountain entice these birds to perform fascinating and entertaining aerial acrobatics.

During the past 25 to 30 years there has been a remarkable eastward invasion by some western animals. Armadillos, coyotes, and roadrunners are common. Black bears, through wildlife management efforts, are making a strong comeback in the area.

EARLY PEOPLE

The earliest clues of prehistoric people on Rich and Winding Stair Mountains were left at campsites, probably where they rested after a hard day of hunting or stone quarrying. The mountain slopes were too steep for full time residence. When the climate warmed at the end of the Ice Age, prehistoric people turned from the plains to these mountains to hunt smaller forest game and collect edible plant products such as acorns and berries. Chert, a rock common on these mountain slopes, was valued by prehistoric people for tools and weapons.

The Caddoan people lived in the river valleys below. Evidence of their existence has been found dating back 10,000 years. Archeologists, using popular scientific methods, have pieced together the history of a people who changed over time from a nomadic hunting, gathering culture to a pottery making, horticultural society, and finally a very

settled farming community. At that point, all evidence of these people disappears, leaving scientists with another question to answer. “ What happened?”

INDIAN TERRITORY AND THE CHOCTAW PEOPLE

Everything west of the Arkansas-Oklahoma stateline was known as Indian Territory starting in 1832. The Choctaws occupied much of the southeastern part of Indian Territory including what is now LeFlore, McCurtain, Pushmataha, Haskell, Latimer, and Choctaw counties in Oklahoma. Their ancestral home was central and northern Mississippi where, in 1776, they numbered about 12,000. They lived in well-constructed houses. Their schools and churches had missionary teachers and preachers. The Choctaws were quick to adopt new ideas and products introduced by Spanish explorers and French traders and trappers.

In the early 1800s the ancestral home of the Choctaw was flooded with white settlers who wanted them to eliminate tribal government and adopt state law. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, and the Indian Removal Act that followed, forced the Choctaws to move westward to preserve their tribal traditions and government.

Families who made the move and became prominent in the new Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma including the Folsoms, sons of an intermarried Englishman, and the McCurtains, Choctaws who took an English name. Peter Conser became a well-known and respected law enforcement officer. His family home, near Heavener, has been restored and is a proud reminder of the part played by the Choctaws in the early days of Oklahoma.

The Choctaws took an active part in the Civil war, siding with the Confederacy. They were proud of their part in this war and suffered great losses. In 1907 Oklahoma became a state and they accepted United States citizenship. The Choctaws still make up a large part of southeast Oklahoma's population.

OTHER SETTLERS

Arkansas became a state in 1836. The earliest settlers in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas arrived about 1830 and were largely immigrants from the mountains of Tennessee, Kentucky and northern Georgia. Some arrived here from the lowlands of Mississippi where malaria and other infectious diseases were rampant. They settled in the fertile river valleys and lived a very primitive, self-reliant life because of the remote and isolated location. The railroads followed by the timber industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s, opened up the state and brought a great surge of immigrants. Towns and settlements sprang up seemingly overnight.

The long crest of Rich Mountain is fairly even, and at points wide enough for homesites, small fields and garden patches. Several prosperous farms existed on the mountain due to the uncommonly rich soil found there and springs that bubbled up to the surface just below the ridge. Though their numbers were few, Rich Mountain had residents from 1860 through 1949. Many secured a land patent from the United States Government under the Homestead Act of 1862. Visible evidence of these homesteads

remain in the form of clearings grown up to thickets, old rock foundations and chimneys, log buildings and stone fences, rock terraces, traces of old wagon roads, paths to springs, trails down to the valleys, old fruit trees and graves.

If you come upon any of these remnants of early settlers, enjoy them but please leave them as you found them. By leaving these artifacts undisturbed, you may help preserve a part of our country's heritage.

THE TOWN

MENA ARKANSAS: The town of Mena was born in 1896 with the arrival of the Kansas City Southern Railroad (KCSR). A tent city of 5,000 grew almost over night. The town was named for Mena DeGoiejen, the wife of one of the Dutch investors in the railroad.

Mena, the county seat of Polk County, is located at the east end of the Talimena Scenic drive. The community has 6,500 residents supported by several factories, poultry, swine and cattle operations, and a thriving timber industry. Mena is home to the Rich Mountain Community College and is a popular retirement community. Cossatot River State Park, as well as the Ouachita National Forest, offer a wide variety of outdoor opportunities. A hospital, restaurants, hotels and antique stores are a few of the services available.

TALIHINA, OKLAHOMA: Talihina is a small rural community of 1,300 residents located at the western end of the Ouachita Mountains, seven miles southwest of the Talimena Scenic drive. The town has a western atmosphere accredited to the farming and ranching industry in the area. Located in the Kiamichi Valley, the community offers visitors several restaurants, motels, convenience marts, and a grocery store. Hunting, fishing, horseback riding and camping are favorite pastimes. The lakes, trail systems and developed recreation facilities on state and federal lands attract many visitors each year.

HEAVENER, OKLAHOMA: Heavener is located 15 miles north of Cedar Lake Recreation Area and seven miles east of Wister Lake State Park. Industry consists of a chicken processing plant, hatchery and feed mill which is a major employer of the town's 2,800 residents. Kansas City Southern Railroad maintains a depot here and is the second largest employer.

The friendly, outgoing community of Heavener offers visitors a variety of restaurants, two motels, convenience marts, and grocery stores. The Lamplight Theater features musicians on Friday nights at no charge to the public. Rune Stone State Park, located 2.5 miles east of Heavener, offers beautiful hiking trails.

POTEAU, OKLAHOMA: Poteau is a great place to live, and was listed in *THE BEST SMALL TOWNS IN AMERICA*, a book by Norton Crampton. Thirteen miles north of Heavener, this full-service community has a well-developed downtown shopping area including a variety of restaurants and motels. Many of the 10,000 residents work at the Wortz cookie and cracker factory, nearby Applied Energy Services Cogeneration plant,

the hospital or in agricultural related businesses such as chicken, wheat, maize or soybean farming.

OUACHITA NATIONAL FOREST

The Talimena Scenic Drive lies entirely within the boundaries of the 1.78 million – acres Ouachita National Forest.

Rich in history, the rugged Ouachita Mountains were first explored in 1541 by Hernando DeSoto's party of Spaniards. French explorers followed in the 1600s, trapping wildlife for pelts and trading with the Indians. Settlers from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama came in the 1800s looking for land to farm. The railroads at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s opened up the area to the timber industry creating railroad and mill towns almost overnight.

In the early 1900s, numerous mineral springs located on or near the Forest attracted visitors from every country and climate to pitch their tents and “rusticate” in the shady woods.

Today, visitors choose from a wide array of outdoor recreation pursuits including sight-seeing, picnicking, camping, hiking, driving for pleasure, horseback riding, swimming, fishing, hunting and boating. Native plants and wildlife attract the naturalist as well as the camera buff, and a Forest's complex geology make it a rockhound's paradise.

Recreation facilities scattered across the national forest invite visitors to remote mountain settings, scenic streams, quiet lakes, clear-flowing springs, natural pools and waterfalls. Some facilities have nature trails with short, easy –to-walk pathways and illustrated interpretive signs,

The USDA Forest Service manages the Ouachita National Forest. The law requires that these lands be managed for a variety of benefits including outdoor recreation, timber, water, forage, wildlife habitat, wilderness and minerals. Careful management practices and successful coordination of public users assure that the resource demands placed on the national forest are met and the productivity and environmental quality of the lands are maintained for this and future generations to enjoy.