

# Riding Northwest Arkansas

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The roads of Northwest Arkansas are some of the best motorcycle roads in the country. For those of you who have never ridden in Arkansas then you are in for a real treat. There is much to love about these roads. They usually have great road surfaces, amazing curves, beautiful scenery, and the local law enforcement in Arkansas is much more lenient than in places like the tail of the dragon. One of the best things about these roads is that every turn is very clearly marked with consistent speed limits. This makes it easy to ride roads that are new to you at a brisk pace because the posted speed limits really give you a good idea of how tight the corner is going to be even when you can't see the other side of the corner. I have a basic rule that I follow while riding through the curves in Arkansas that usually allows me to ride at about 80% bike capability so I can ride fast but still have cornering ability left just in case I need it:

- Posted Speed Limit 15mph or below = Slow down now! These turns are sharp. Do not try to fly through them. Do the speed limit or close to it.
- Posted Speed Limit 15-25 mph = Take the corner at 10-15mph above the posted speed limit.
- Posted Speed Limit 25-45 mph = Take the corner at 20mph over the posted speed limit.
- Posted Speed Limit 45+ mph = Don't slow down for these corners unless riding at a very high rate of speed.

If I follow those rules it seems to me that I get a good brisk ride for 99% of the roads in Arkansas and I still have just enough left in reserve to account for any unforeseen situations. As always, please ride at whatever pace feels comfortable to you. This guide is nothing more than my personal experience in NW Arkansas and I encourage you to plan your own routes and places to see. Maybe you can find a new road that I have never ridden before or a new stop that I've never seen before. It's more enjoyable that way!

## Safety Observations

I have a few safety observations that I recommend everyone follow that comes from my experience riding in Arkansas. I'm not preaching to anyone but simply trying to reflect from my experiences to new Arkansas riders.

1. If you are going to ride hard, I would recommend wearing a helmet. I think wearing a helmet is everyone's personal choice but a lot of these roads are in very, very rural areas with a lot of trees or cliffs waiting for you if you leave the road. It could take a very long time for an ambulance to reach you if you leave the road in some of these areas so a serious head injury could be very, very bad. If you don't ride hard it probably isn't that big of a deal (although wearing a helmet is never a bad idea).
2. Do not get distracted looking at scenery while riding! It never fails but every year I see people leave the road while not paying attention because they are looking at the beautiful scenery. Arkansas is a beautiful state and if you enjoy looking at the scenery then slow down or stop. There are way too many curves through most of these roads for you to be concentrating on something other than the road.

3. Absolutely, positively make sure your tires are in good condition before you come to ride in June. It never fails that every time someone thinks their tires will make it through one more Arkansas trip they have to waste a day trying to find new tires and have them mounted. These Arkansas roads offer great grip while cornering but they absolutely chew up tires faster than any other road I have ever seen. If you think you can get this one last trip in and you will change that tire when you get back then do yourself a favor and put a new tire on before the trip. Trust me on this one! I can't emphasize this enough. Why would you want to risk losing a great day of riding because you wore your tire out sooner than expected?
4. Do everything possible to be back in Eureka Springs before nightfall. At night these mountain roads are dark and treacherous and when you can't see every corner jumps out at you without notice. I've seen a group of five very experienced riders try to get back to the hotel while dark and three of the five riders ended up leaving the road on that trip. Don't get caught out at night!
5. Be extra careful on the downhill corners. There are some seriously steep grades on some of these roads and when you combine them with very sharp corners it can become a problem. For example, when riding Hwy 74 into Jasper there are some very steep downhill turns that will surprise you if you aren't paying attention. Don't try to drag your pegs on corners like these, they are too steep. If you notice in a couple of my ride descriptions below I give a recommended ride direction so that you hit the really steep sharp stuff going uphill. It's more fun going up these turns than down them.
6. Don't pass gas stations. If you look at many of these rural towns on a map you would assume they had a gas station and you would be wrong. Like I said before NW Arkansas is a very rural area and gas stations can be few and far between. Always get gas in Jasper and if you are getting at all close to empty don't pass by the next gas station thinking you catch one a little later down the road because there may not be one.
7. This one is obvious but don't drink and ride. It always seems to be a problem around Bikes, Blues, and BBQ. You always see a lot of wrecks around Turners Bend because people stop and drink then get back on their bike.

## The Rides

Now on to the good stuff! Here are some of my favorite roads to ride in NW Arkansas and some of my personal experience with them. I have colored my favorite roads on a ride map with different colors and listed the colors below in the descriptions. The ride map is located on the last page of this document. Since I ran out of colors to use on the ride map I colored the shorter roads and misc roads all a light blue color on the map.

**Hwy 23, The Pigs Trail (Blue Color on Ride Map)** – This road is an Arkansas staple and it starts at I-40 and runs north into Eureka Springs. The best section is the southern end from I-40 to Brashears but the entire ride into Eureka Springs is nice. The road surface is pretty good and there are some really nice corners on this road as well with two very sharp 180° turns. I think the best part of this road is in many areas the trees completely cover the road like a canopy and it's like driving through a tunnel made of trees which can be a really neat experience. Turners Bend is a gas station and bar that sells all kinds of Pigs Trail memorabilia and is usually a must stop for first time riders. The only downside to this road is that there can be a decent amount of traffic and Semi trucks which can make it difficult to ride at a brisk pace.

**Hwy 123, The Arkansas Dragon (Red Color on Ride Map)** – This road is a favorite of sport bike riders and my favorite road in Arkansas. Sharp turns don't even begin to describe this road so if you're into lazy cruising or long sweepers this may not be the road for you. My favorite part of the Arkansas Dragon is the section starting just outside of Jasper and going south over Mt Judea. This part has a section of 5 mph sharp switchbacks going up Mt Judea and eventually graduates into faster and faster switchbacks. I personally feel like this road has a little bit of everything and is the most challenging road that I have found in Arkansas so far. Also, the views going up Mt Judea are absolutely beautiful. Although my favorite part of the road is the section going up Mt Judea the entire road south to I-40 is wonderful. If you're going to ride this road I definitely recommend running south and not north because you will be going down the sharpest and steepest part of Mt Judea and you literally just crawl down the mountain in first gear and on your brakes the whole time. A great plus to this road is that it has an almost perfect road surface and is in the middle of nowhere so there is almost no traffic.



*View from the top of Mt Judea on Hwy 123*

**Hwy 7 (Green Color on Ride Map)** – If you're riding from the south this road is one of the best roads to just get on and stay on until you reach northern Arkansas (or vice versa). This road has wonderful sweepers throughout the entire road but the best sections is Hwy 7 just north of Hot Springs and Hwy 7 from I-40 through Jasper, AR. If you like miles and miles of curves and scenic views you can't go wrong with Hwy 7, especially around the Jasper area. The Cliffhouse Inn and Restaurant is located on Hwy 7 about seven miles south of Jasper and is a great place to get a bite to eat and enjoy the scenic view of the Arkansas Grand Canyon. There is also a great lookout tower about 5 miles south of Jasper on Hwy 7 that is great for pictures and scenic views.

**Hwy 103 and Hwy 215 (Yellow Color on Ride Map)** – This road is one of my favorite roads in Arkansas only behind the Dragon. I like this route as an alternative to the Pigs Trail because I don't like dealing with traffic and slow Harley riders when I ride. Hwy 103 runs north out of Clarksville and climbs us a mountain with some extremely sharp switchbacks that are a blast to ride. I would recommend riding Hwy 103 North because the steep corners are more fun that way. It then meets up with Hwy 215 which

runs west and directly into the Pigs Trail just north of Turners Bend. Hwy 215 has great sweepers and is a very scenic road. Hwy 215 follows a winding mountain stream the entire way is truly beautiful. I really love this route because it gives you an awesome ride and unbelievable scenery all at the same time. Then it dumps you off on the Pigs Trail just in place to ride the best part of the Pigs Trail going north.

Please note that while I was there last year there was some serious construction taking place for a couple of miles on Hwy 215. They had ripped up the road and we had to ride on really rough gravel and dirt for a couple of miles. From what I understand the construction is supposed to be finished by this spring but who knows if it is going to finish on time. So if you are at all hesitant about riding on gravel then you may wait on this route until someone else rides it and verifies that the construction is finished.



*Mountain stream view on Hwy 215*

**Hwy 21, Hwy 43, Hwy 74 to Jasper (Violet Color on the Ride Map)** – This is another nice road which runs north and south just like the pigs trail. The nice thing about this road is that you still get great curves and sweepers like the Pigs Trail but there is usually less traffic on Hwy 21. If you break off of Hwy 21 onto Hwy 43 it will run you through Boxley Valley which is one of the most beautiful areas of Arkansas. From there you can take Hwy 74 east to Jasper and the ride into Jasper on Hwy 74 is just awesome. Once you're in Jasper you are pretty much in the dead center of the best roads in Arkansas and you can ride any direction you want to find great roads. If you want to stay on Hwy 21 going north (light blue section of ride map) it runs through a tiny town of Kingston which has a neat little town square and some antique shops. Kingston is a very old style town and there is no gas station there. But if you have to use the restroom one of the local shop owners will let you use his outhouse out back. It is still the only place I've ever been where they have a fully functional outhouse and no bathroom.

**Hwy 16 from St. Paul to Sand Gap (Orange Color on Ride Map)** – This road is a nice ride that runs east and west and connects to all the great motorcycles roads that run north and south (Hwy 23, 21, 7, and 123). So this road is a great road to take so that you can jump between the longer rides that run north and south and it is a great ride itself.

**Hwy 309 over Mt Magazine (Light Blue on Ride Map)** – This section of Hwy 309 over Mt Magazine is south of I-40 and runs north through Paris and Ozark. This is one of the most beautiful and scenic roads in Arkansas and once you get on top of Mt Magazine there are a ton of scenic lookouts to stop and take in the scenery. The road going up the mountain is very winding but this is a very popular scenic area so there can be a decent amount of traffic on the road as well. If you are riding into Eureka Springs from Texas or the south and like to take in the scenery then this may be a good road for you to take on your trip into Eureka Springs. Riding north on Hwy 309 basically runs right into the Pigs Trail at I-40 so you could take in the scenery of Mt Magazine and ride the corners of the Pigs Trail into Eureka Springs and it would make for a great ride.

There are many other great roads in Arkansas as well. Hwy 62 (light blue on the ride map) into the west side of Eureka Springs is a beautiful ride and I really enjoy the fast sweepers of Hwy 12 through Hobbs State Park and over Beaver lake in north west Arkansas. There are a couple of roads that I haven't ridden yet that are supposed to be good roads like Hwy 27 from Dover to Marshall (light blue on the map). To be honest you most of the roads in NW Arkansas are great so it's really hard to go wrong here. But the rides listed above are what I consider the staples of NW Arkansas. Remember to reference the ride map on the last page for the locations of the rides and places to see.

## Places to See

These are some of the places that I have visited or like to visit while riding in NW Arkansas. This is by no means a comprehensive list of places because I typically don't stop at a lot of places and I'm not really into sightseeing. It's usually all about the ride for me so you can definitely find a lot more places to visit by doing your own research on the internet. These are just the places that I have some personal experience with. I have flagged the places on the ride map on and I have listed the corresponding flag number below in the places descriptions.

**Boxley Valley (Flag #1 on Ride Map)** – Boxley Valley is located on Hwy 43 at the intersection of Hwy 21, just west of Jasper. This is a favorite area for photographers and wildlife seekers. This is also the best place to see elk in Northwest Arkansas. This is a very beautiful area of Arkansas and we usually consider it a must see for first time Arkansas riders.

**War Eagle Mill (Flag #2 on Ride Map)** – This is a really neat traditional water mill that makes wonderful food and grain. It also has a restaurant in the top floor of the mill. This is typically a must stop for first time Arkansas riders. They also have a really scenic bridge that is awesome for taking pictures. If you want to check out more of their information you can visit their website here: [www.wareaglemill.com](http://www.wareaglemill.com)

**Cliffhouse Inn and Restaurant (Flag #3 on Ride Map)** – This restaurant is located on Hwy 7, seven miles south of Jasper. It is a restaurant that literally hangs off a cliff that overlooks the Arkansas Grand Canyon. You can enjoy a good meal and a great view at the same time. It's a nice place to stop for lunch on your ride.



*View from the Cliffhouse Restaurant, overlooking the Arkansas Grand Canyon*

**Jasper Lookout Tower (Flag #3 on Ride Map)** – Five miles south of Jasper is a very tall scenic lookout tower that you can climb to get a beautiful view of the mountains. If you are into scenic views or taking nice pictures with the bike then this is a nice place to stop.



*Lookout point about 5 miles south of Jasper on Hwy 7*

**Turners Bend (Flag #4 on Ride Map)** – This is a neat little bar and gas station located at the south end of the pigs trail (near I-40). It is a typical biker hangout that has a lot of pigs trail memorabilia. This is also typically a must stop if you've never been there (you can get you a pigs trail patch, pin, etc). If you're going to be riding the pigs trail you might as well stop by Turners Bend.



*Turners Bend on the Pigs Trail*

**Parker Hickman Homestead (Flag #5 on Ride Map)** – This is a neat old log cabin located west of Jasper. You can find information about this on the internet but it is supposed to be the oldest home on the Buffalo River. If you are into history or old style log cabins this can be an interesting place to visit.

That's about the sum of my knowledge of NW Arkansas riding. Hopefully this helps someone with their trip planning. Remember to reference the ride map for the locations of the rides and sights to see that I have outlined here. Also, remember to plan your own trip and don't take what I have said for gospel. This trip is all about everyone doing what they want to do so everyone can enjoy it as much as possible. I'll see everyone in June for some good riding and good times!

# Ride Map

