



**American Adventure**  
Eureka Springs, Arkansas



# Healing Properties

Riding On An Ozark Mountain High

BY DAVID BELL

**L**iving in the middle of one of the nation's motorcycling meccas means fine riding every day, with twisty roads, beautiful scenery, and light traffic. The daily ride to town and back through the lush, forested mountains of the Ozarks is one many riders in the US would love to make occasionally. In the heart of this rider's dreamland lies Carroll County, Arkansas, and the heartbeat of Carroll County is Eureka Springs, a Victorian-era town founded on the Fourth of July.

## The Town That Water Built

For hundreds of years, Native Americans revered the natural springs of this area for their healing properties. By the mid-1800s, white settlers began to make their way to the springs for the same reasons. Instead of camping there, white men built a settlement, Eureka Springs. It became a health resort even before it was incorporated, and Eureka (as it's often referred to locally) soon became arguably the most renowned health resort of its time. Shortly after its founding in 1879, the town's population swelled to over 10,000 permanent residents, plus visitors.

The architecture of Eureka Springs is highly influenced by the Victorian era. Homes and businesses alike were built in the then-contemporary style. Eureka is situated on both sides of a steep mountain valley, and the streets of the city wind through town like a tangled garden hose.

In the late 1800s, Ozark water from Eureka was bottled and marketed across the country for its health benefits. Because of this connection with water, Eureka Springs earned the nickname "the town that water built," and by the turn of the century, it had become a bona fide boomtown.

In the early 20th century, the fortunes of Eureka took a downturn as modern scientific medicine



replaced the quaint notion of healing waters. That the boomtown built on water went into decline in the 1920s may actually be why it's such a well-preserved treasure today. With its economic base collapsed, it was relatively stagnant until the 1960s, when two different groups rediscovered Eureka Springs.

Back-to-a-simpler-lifestyle hippy artists and craftsmen moved into many of Eureka's Victorian homes and shops, and at about the same time a religious organization, the Smith Foundation, selected Eureka Springs as the site of its large-scale, outdoor production of *The Great Passion Play*, based on the historic German production about the last week of Christ's life. These two diverse groups resurrected the town, turning it back into a tourist destination — this time, though, based on the arts and not water.

Because Eureka was never modernized, so to speak, it is not a theme park-type recreation of a Victorian village, but the real deal. It's been named one of the 12 Distinctive Destinations in the US by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the entire Historic District is listed as a single entity on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, Eureka Springs works hard to maintain its Victorian charm and feel amid its still diverse population. And because it's an economy based on tourism, Eureka is extremely rider-friendly.

## The Historic District

The best way to sample Eureka Springs is to take a ride on what is called the Historic Loop. This is a single route, but it changes street names with almost every turn. Beautiful buildings abound. At the midway point, the loop passes by St. Elizabeth Catholic Church and the historic 1886 Crescent Hotel & Spa. The Crescent, purported to be haunted, sits on a high mountainside with a commanding view of the Eureka valley. It has been restored to splendid turn-of-the-last-century elegance, but with all the necessary modern amenities.

From the Crescent Hotel, the loop proceeds down another steep hillside with a hairpin turn at the bottom. This leads through the official Historic District, with Victorian homes on each side, and continues to downtown proper. The lush, overhanging trees on this portion of the loop provide a cool respite even on hot summer days.

Once downtown, find a parking place and start out on foot; explore the wonderful galleries, shops, cafes, and watering holes Eureka has to offer. Great shopping and dining is not the exclusive domain of downtown, however.

Eureka Springs is entertainment-intensive. On any given weekend, Eureka plays host to numerous events whose names are self-explanatory — Blues Festival, Folk Festival, Jazz Festival, and the May Arts Festival. There are also plenty of car and bike events, such as the annual Antique Car Show, Corvette Weekend, Scootercade, and a VROC Rally. Lots of other motorcycle groups host events here as well. Live music is always on tap at the many watering holes around town, and there is always something going on in Basin Park, the focal point of downtown.

Here's the current scoop on downtown parking meters: parking downtown is tight, so multiple bikes are allowed in a single space. The catch is, if the time expires on the meter, all the bikes in that spot receive a ticket. So, if you're new to a parking spot, local custom dictates you add a few coins to the meter for you and the rest of the bikes parked there.

There are plenty of rider-owned businesses in Eureka Springs. One is Roscoe's Music & Espresso Cafe, a Saturday morning local riders' meeting place. Many savvy, knowledgeable



enthusiasts from the area meet at Roscoe's for a couple of hours to tank up on caffeine and conversation before splitting for their weekend ride. "We meet, and if anyone is considering buying a new bike, we talk him into it," Roscoe says with a smile and dry wit.

## Mayberry or Berryville?

The areas outside the Historic District also abound with great places to dine and explore. To the east 12 miles on US Route 62, is Berryville, the Mayberry-esque county seat of Carroll County. Berryville is not the touristy destination that Eureka is, but it does have a classic downtown square, with its 1880s brick courthouse, boutiques, antique shops, and restaurants. The square is home to a traditional Southern diner, the Ozark Cafe, as well as great Mexican restaurants, and, interestingly, several Chinese places.

A world-class gun collection is housed at the Saunders Memorial Museum. The city-owned museum was a bequest to Berryville by long-time resident Burton O. "Buck" Saunders. His private collection includes rare guns, as well as handguns owned by the famous and infamous — Jesse James, "Wild Bill" Hickok, "Cherokee Bill," Belle Starr, and others. The museum also houses



Saunders' extensive collection of antique furniture, crystal, plates and service sets, and, oddly, an Arabian sheikh's tent, which Saunders won in a wager with a desert prince over who was the better shot with a handgun.

## Riding Carroll County

When it gets down to it, though, bikers ride because we enjoy the open road, and Carroll County has more than its share of the best roads in the Ozarks. Here are just a few don't-miss rides in the Carroll County area of the Ozarks.

Race Track Road, which runs south out of Berryville, is what local riders call Arkansas State Route 221 South. Mile for mile, it's arguably the best ride in the Ozarks, and not many visitors know about this unless they hear about it from a local rider. It's the road I'm fortunate to travel into town every day. Set in gorgeous timber and farmland, 221 South stretches 10 miles to the county line and has it all, long straight stretches, broad sweepers, and knee-dragging curves. The highway is in great shape, but be watchful for animals, both domestic and wild, and for gravel that's washed down onto the road from unimproved side roads and driveways. And even though traffic is light, be on the lookout for slow and oncoming traffic. Catch County Road 302 (locally known as Rock House Road) for a paved — narrow, winding, but scenic — ride to Eureka Springs.



The Beaver Town/Beaver Dam Loop is a favorite of locals and visitors alike. Take Arkansas State Route 23 north out of Eureka Springs a couple of miles to State Route 187. Head west and wind your way down to the town of Beaver. A wonderful piece of eye candy awaits you at the bottom of the hill, as you

cross the White River, a spectacular one-lane suspension bridge, known as The Little Golden Gate. It's an area landmark listed on the National Register. Continuing on, 187 winds through beautiful countryside and hooks up with US Route 62. The two roads, 187 and 62, run concurrently for a few miles. Then 187 branches off, crosses Beaver Dam, winds through more beautiful timberland, and ends where it rejoins 62. Continue on twisty 62 to get back to Eureka Springs. This loop is a short ride, great for an afternoon excursion. It's hard to beat and fun to repeat.

Meanwhile, 23 has been listed in numerous driving magazines as one of the top 10 driving roads in the US. It bisects Eureka Springs on its run from the northern border to more than halfway down the state. A particularly twisty stretch is called The Pig Trail. This legendary highway is a beautiful twisty byway. But State Route 21 is an equally excellent ride. A nice day-long run is south on 23 to the Ozarks, then east to Clarksville, and back north on the equally scenic and winding 21, which runs through the beautiful Boxley Valley, headwaters of the Buffalo National River.

## Ozark Mountain High

I guess you might say I'm a spoiled rider. My paradigm for riding is simple: great roads, beautiful scenery, and interesting places to visit. From my home in Carroll County, all the Ozarks are my playground and within easy reach. As Dean Martin sings, "How lucky can one man be?"

RB



## INFORMATION

**Eureka Springs Chamber of Commerce**  
800/638-7352  
[www.EurekaSpringsChamber.com](http://www.EurekaSpringsChamber.com)

**Berryville Chamber of Commerce**  
[www.BerryvilleAR.com](http://www.BerryvilleAR.com)

**Ozarks motorcycle-specific trip-planning web site**  
[www.CruiseTheOzarks.com](http://www.CruiseTheOzarks.com)

**Arkansas Tourism**  
[www.Arkansas.com](http://www.Arkansas.com)



## LODGING AND DINING

**The 1886 Crescent Hotel & Spa**  
75 Prospect Ave.  
Eureka Springs, AR  
877/342-9766  
[www.Crescent-Hotel.com](http://www.Crescent-Hotel.com)

**Roscoe's Music & Espresso Cafe**  
155 West Van Buren  
Eureka Springs, AR  
479/253-5876

**Ozark Cafe**  
208 Public Square, Berryville, AR  
870/423-6511

## ATTRACTIONS

**Saunders Memorial Museum**  
113-115 East Madison  
Berryville, AR  
870/423-2563

**Little Golden Gate Bridge**  
Beaver, AR  
[www.LittleGoldenGate-Arkansas.com](http://www.LittleGoldenGate-Arkansas.com)