

Crystal Vista

Auto Tour

Ouachita National Forest



Forest  Service
United States Department of Agriculture

WELCOME to the Ouachita National Forest! Often it is only trees we think of when forests are mentioned. However, amidst the trees are hidden treasures — plants, animals, rocks, minerals, soils, water and air. All interact together to form a dynamic, living network — the **forest ecosystem**.

Drive this auto tour and take a closer look at your national forest. Touch a rock fold, pick up a crystal, drive along a streamside woodland and explore an old-growth forest. See how natural forces, human demands and time shape the forest you see today.

This 21 mile tour will take approximately 1 hour to drive. Plan extra time if you are going to hike to Crystal Vista. The tour begins at the Womble Visitor Information and Ranger Station on Highway 270 East, turns south onto Logan Gap Road and continues east and west on Forest Road 177 and Forest Road 2237. The tour continues north on Highway 27 to Mt. Ida and then east on Highway 270 returning to the Womble Ranger Station.

Approximately one half of the route is paved highway and the rest is gravel roads maintained for automobile traffic. There will be several dirt roads leading off into the forest. Often these roads will not be kept in a condition suitable for passenger vehicles so please stay on the designated route. All intersections and stops are marked with signs.



Womble Visitor Information and Ranger Station

(The station is located on Highway 270 E, east of Mt. Ida.)

COME IN AND VISIT - Here you can find information on campgrounds, trails and picnic areas within the national forest. Local community information is also available. Permits for collecting forest products such as firewood and rocks are issued here. Check out the aquarium in the front office. It is filled with fish and animals that live in local streams.



The Seed Orchard

(From the ranger station travel 1.9 miles east on Highway 270. Turn north onto Forest Road 859-1. At the "Y" take a right onto Forest Road 859-2. The seed orchard is 0.6 mile from Highway 270.)

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE - For 30 years, this 700-acre Forest Service facility has been devoted to growing superior trees. Tornados, wind storms, and bug infestations often strip a forest of its trees. Seedlings generated from the seeds grown here have been used to replant areas in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri.

You are welcome to visit the facility, open most week days. If the gates are closed, feel free to park at the gate, walk in and take a look.

Not all trees are alike. Some grow bigger, faster, and straighter. These are the ones that we collect seed from because they are more likely to produce the same qualities in their offspring. The trees you see have been selected by Forest Service tree experts using a long list of criteria. The goal is to develop future trees with superior growth rate, disease and pest resistance, survival rate, and form (shape) characteristics.

MOSAIC OF LAND OWNERSHIP - Notice the farms and homes you pass as you travel down these roads. Land ownership patterns are often patchy within the Ouachita National Forest boundary. Black and yellow national forest boundary signs mark public land boundaries.



Ocus Stanley Fold

(Travel east on Highway 270 for 2.6 miles. Turn south on to Logan Gap Road, 0.25 mile west of the Mt. Ida Airport. Drive 1 mile south on Logan Gap Road. At this point, the road will cut through a hill. Stop at the tour stop sign.

Look at the exposed rock layers.)

FOLDING UNDER PRESSURE - A continental shoving match caused the folded rocks you see in the hillside wall along the road. About 300 million years ago, long before humans walked the earth, the North American and South American continents collided. For about 100 million years a shoving match between the two continents pushed up, broke and folded the rocks and earth. The result — the Ouachita Mountains, however not exactly the mountains you see today!

Following this shoving match, the Ouachitas may have been 5,000 to 10,000 feet high. Weathering and erosion slowly whittled the range down to the present size, with the highest point being a little more than 2,750 feet above sea level.



Lil' Blue Phantom Mine

(At the intersection of Forest Road 177 and Logan Gap Road turn east and travel 1 mile. At the sign for the mine park your car off the road and walk up the old road 100 feet. At the "Y" in the road turn right. Continue on for another 500 feet. The road ends at a beautiful grass covered opening.)

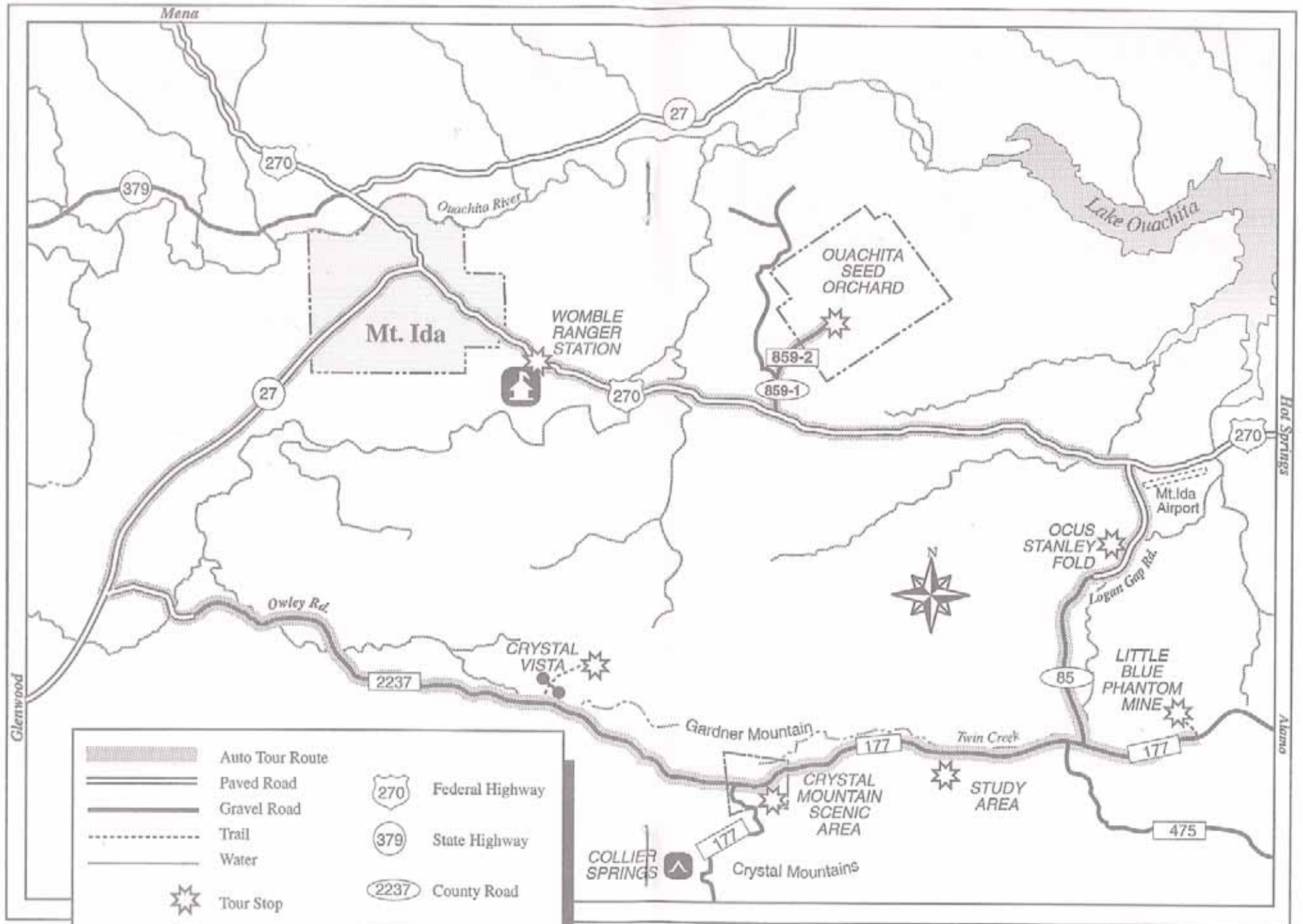
FROM TREES TO CRYSTALS TO WILDLIFE - The use of this area has changed dramatically in the last several decades. In the early 1970's, this space supported a pine and hardwood forest. Harvested in the late 1970's, it was replanted with pines in 1980.

Quartz crystals were discovered here in the mid-1980's and a mining contract was issued. Because the crystals are hidden below the surface, miners often dig rather large holes to find them. The crystal vein played out and the mine was closed in 1990.

Miners on national forest lands are required to restore all land damaged by their mining operations. A bond issued at the time of the contract helped pay to restore this area. The hole was filled and the area seeded with grass.

This opening, created by the mining operation, allows grasses and tender shoots to grow that normally would not if the land had not been disturbed. This provides abundant food for wildlife such as deer, wild turkeys, and bear. Approach quietly, and you may catch some of the wild residents eating, socializing or just enjoying the sun.

(After returning to your car, take Forest Road 177 west back to the intersection of Logan Gap Rd. Continue west on Forest Road 177. At this point you will begin traveling along a small stream north of the road.)



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TWIN CREEK

WET, WILD AND WONDERFUL - Small streamside areas like the one you are driving by on Forest Road 177 are critical for forest wildlife and neighboring human communities. Twin Creek and other streams in the Ouachita Mountains eventually make their way into municipal water supplies. Perhaps some of the water you drank today originated in this stream!

Wildlife also depends on these streams for water. The woodlands surrounding the streams provide food and cover for animals. Like giant filters, shrubs and trees also prevent soil and debris from washing into the water.

From mining, to timber harvesting, to developing recreation facilities, any activity in the national forest must prove that it will not harm streamside woodlands. Protecting these areas assures such forest benefits as clean water, wildlife variety and scenic beauty.



Shortleaf Pine Study Area

(Go 0.9 mile west of the intersection of Logan Gap Road and Forest Road 177 to a small study area. Look east of the road for trees posted with small yellow and black signs saying, "Experimental Area".)

WATCHING THE TREES GROW - Notice many of the trees are marked with paint. The trees in this area are part of the shortleaf pine study area. Every 10 years Forest Service researchers measure many of these trees to see how much they have grown. They can use this data to calculate health and estimate growth rates of similar pine forests.

Crystal Mountain Sandstone

CHIPS OFF THE OLD MOUNTAIN - As you begin climbing the ridge, you will see an increase of scattered rocks and rock formations. The Crystal Mountain sandstone, one of the major components of these hills, is thought to be about 500 million years old. Arkansas was once an ocean very much like today's Gulf of Mexico, whose floor was mostly sand and mud. Eventually the water receded and the sand and mud hardened into shale and sandstone layered one on top of the other.

Piles of rock in this area are what is left of mountain peaks that 250 million years ago may have been comparable in size to the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountain ranges today. The Ouachita mountains are an old range growing shorter through natural erosion. Mountain building processes such as continental collisions, volcanoes and earthquakes are no longer active. The abundance of rocks makes this area a popular rock collection area. Professional stone masons and home owners from the area get permission from the local ranger to collect building stone.



Crystal Mountain Scenic Area

(A sign on the north side of Forest Road 177 is posted 1.6 miles from the Study Area. Travel 0.3 mile farther to a larger sign on the south side of the road. The sign explains the significance of this area.)

OLD FORESTS TO GO WITH OLD HILLS - The average age of the trees in the Crystal Mountain Scenic Area is its claim to fame. Although not as old as the sandstone, at 300 years of age, these trees are old in comparison to others in the area. Like any other living thing, trees and forests go through

life stages. Each stage has special qualities advantageous for different animals and plants. One example is the once common red-cockaded woodpecker who prefers old hollow pines for nesting sites. Preserving old-growth forests may be crucial to the survival of many species such as the red cockaded woodpecker, dependent on the special environmental conditions created by this life stage.

A SIDE TRIP TO COLLIER SPRING

(From the intersection of Forest Road 2237 and Forest Road 177, travel south on Forest Road 177 for 1 mile.)

Enjoy the delightful natural forest setting surrounding this flowing spring. A great place to stop for a picnic, this remote site has tables, a restroom and a picnic shelter.



Crystal Vista

(Crystal Vista is 1.9 miles west of the Crystal Mountain Scenic Area. From the scenic area travel west on Forest Road 177.

At the intersection continue traveling west on Forest Road 2237 (Owley Road). You will find a small parking area on the north side of the road. Park here and hike to the top of the road to a reclaimed quartz mine.)

HIDDEN TREASURE - Recently, a local miner and the Forest Service did something a little different. Instead of just rehabilitating the old mine site they decided to create a recreation area. Working together, a mine was transformed into a public rock-hounding site. This ridgetop mine produced an abundance of quartz crystal in the 6 years it had been in operation. When the mine was closed, a bulldozer was brought in to stabilize slopes and eliminate hazards. Grass seed was planted in places where soils might erode.

Today, anyone can hike up the road about a mile and collect quartz crystals from the surface of the reclaimed mine. This public collection area is the first of its kind in this forest.

At Crystal Vista, walk to the top of the ridge and enjoy the beautiful views to the north and south. Notice that this ridge and adjacent ridges run east and west. This is a typical feature of the Ouachita Mountains, one of the few ranges in the world that runs east to west.

Remember, while at Crystal Vista use hand tools only to recover crystals. Crystal collected must be for personal use and not for resale.



Mt. Ida

(Continue west on Forest Road 2237 for 4.1 miles. At the junction turn north on State Highway 27. This Highway will take you into Mt. Ida.)

CRYSTAL CAPITAL - The county seat for Montgomery County since 1842, this easy-going rural community is known for its "country style" cooking and rock shops. Quartz crystal is the star attraction. This lovely mineral is prized by collectors, sold as ornaments and made into jewelry. If you prefer to dig your own, contact one of the many local rock merchants who offer this opportunity for a small fee.

Don't miss the Quartz, Quilts and Craft Fair in October! The World Championship Dig is held here every year along with a quilt judging and craft show.

Much of the economy of this community is based in agriculture and tourism. Lakes and rivers in the area offer great fishing. Canoeing is popular on the Ouachita and Caddo Rivers. Lake Ouachita abounds with boating and water sport opportunities, campgrounds and hiking trails. Check with the local Chamber of Commerce or the Forest Service office in Mt. Ida for information.

(Highway 27 combines with Highway 270 in Mt. Ida. Turn east on Highway 270 to return to the ranger station or go to Hot Springs.)

We hope you enjoyed this tour of your national forest. The Ouachita National Forest is an extraordinary place to visit, and this drive highlights just a few of its many treasures. All of this has been brought to you through the combined efforts of the USDA Forest Service and the support of volunteers and partnerships. If you would like to become more involved and learn more about what is going on with your National Forests, please feel free to contact us at any of the offices scattered throughout the forest. Remember...this is your land!

Special thanks to the Arkansas Geological Commission in Little Rock for assistance in developing this brochure.

For more information, contact:

Ouachita National Forest	Womble Ranger District
P.O. Box 1270	HC 63, Box 115 B
Hot Springs, AR 71902	Mount Ida, AR 71957
Telephone 501-321-5202	Telephone 870-867-2101

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