OMH Trail Data / History

Ouachita National Recreation Trail / Sect 6

Ouachita National Forest (AR)

Section 6 of the 223-mile Ouachita National Recreation Trail is 17.6 miles long, with about 600' of vertical variance. This section runs from US Hwy 27 (mile 121.7) in the west to the AR Hwy 298 trailhead (mile 138.8) in the east. The most significant climb is over Sand Lick Mountain, rising over 500' in two miles. Irons Fork Creek (mile 128.8) is actually a small river; the low water bridge is almost 100' across and is often under water. A small waterfall just west of this crossing is a scenic opportunity. A second climb is rewarded with almost eight miles of relatively flat trail, meandering downhill to hwy 298. There are three shelters in this section: John Archer Shelter (m. 122.6), Bill Potter Shelter (m 127.5), and Big Branch Shelter (mile 134.0). Potter and Big Branch sit about 1/2 mile off the trail. Section 6 lies completely within the Jessieville Ranger District.

Planning notes:
1. Read access notes carefully before planning your hike. Some of the "trailheads" are on very rough roads and have no parking. They are suitable for inserting trail maintenance crews, but not a regular hike.
2. For carpool planning, use 60 miles round trip to hwy 27 end; 40 miles round trip to hwy 298 TH
3. Because of the difficult access points, most hikes in this section work best with a "key swap" hike, with two groups walking in opposite directions. The alternative is to have a couple of hikers willing to shuttle cars and walk only a partilal hike.

Access Notes:
1. Hwy 27 Trailhead: On the highway, about five miles north of Story, AR at the crest of a hill.
2. FR 148: FR 148 about 3 miles off US 27; room to park 3 -4 cars on side
3. Irons Fork: Can get to within about 1/4 mile of Irons Fork Creek on jeep roads. Rough road. Limited parking. Access is off Hwy 298, about 7.5 miles west of the 298 trailhead. At Prairie Grove Baptist Church, turn N on Whippoorwill Road (becomes FR 5131). Go two miles to J08. Turn right (E); go about 3.5 miles to end of road. Parking for 4 - 5. Walk back up J08 a couple hundred yards to unmarked FR (I think it is 37400); turn right (N) and walk about 300 yards up this road to the trail. For maintenance equipment, one car can get up this road, but there is no where to turn around. When you hit the trail, you are a few hundred yards west of the low water bridge at Irons Fork.
4. FR 736 (mile 130.4): Access for trail maintenance; small groups ONLY. It is LOUSY for hiking / larger groups. Road is VERY rough. About a mile past FR 78 (southern) trail crossing; take third left turn (FR 736). Immediatley crosses a very rocky creek bed (vans bottom out). Continue a couple miles to top of hill and a parking area just off the trail. Parking area is on left; so is trail. Very disorienting due to twisting road. You are facing east at this turn, opposite to intuition.
5. FR 78 crossings: From 298, turn right on Tabor Mountain Rd (one mile west of TH parking lot); go about 0.1 miles. Turn Right on County Road 119. Go 0.9 miles to FR 78. Turn LEFT, onto unpaved road. South crossing is 0.6 miles; N crossing is 2.9 miles). NO Parking at South crossing (can squeeze 1 -2 cars on side of road); 3 - 4 cars at N crossing.
6. Hwy 298 TH: On the highway; 17 miles from hwy 7 to the east; 11 miles from Story (US 27) to the west. Parking for 8 - 10 cars. The trail westward proceeds along the highway for a couple hundred yards, until crossing a bridge over the North Fork of the Ouachita River. It then proceeds north into the woods.

For additional info: Tim Ernst: "Ouachita Trail Guide" (p. 80-89, in 4th edition). Book is pretty accurate on access points.
USFS Detailed Segment map of the Ouachita Trail (map TR-1/det). Available at USFS offices or at www.fs.fed.us/r8/ouachita/maps/
For current trail conditions, see: Friends of the Ouachita Trail (www.friendsOT.org)

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Recent Hikes:

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Apr 5, 2007 **Leader:** Jim Gifford **23 *Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: Irons Fork Creek to Muddy Creek [128.8 - 118.7]

10.1 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Beautiful spring day; cool and clear. Dogwoods in bloom.
Key swap. Jim led half group westard from Irons Fork; Glen led other half eastward. Westbound group had lunch at John Archer shelter.
Ben walked in from hwy 27 to meet us; then had a flat tire at hwy 27 trailhead. Bo/Brenda helped him fix it and met us at Muddy Creek.

sss: Views from ridge lines

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Mar 1, 2007 **Leader:** Jim Gifford **15 *Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: Hwy 298 Trailhead to Irons Fork crossing (138.8 - 128.8) + walkout

10.5 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

This day was about weather. At 7 am, we were under an active "Tornado Watch" and severe thunderstorm warning". All indications were, however, that the storm was past, we proceeded to the trailhead with clear skies and had a nearly perfect hiking day -- no rain, no thunder, deep blue skies, cool, light breeze.
Ben, Dan, Janis moved the cars to irons fork, so rest of us could hike same direction.
Lunch at outcropping near mile 130.

sss: views from ridges; outcropping, Irons Fork creek ***Waterfall*** Ariel Falls

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Nov 4, 2004 **Leader:** Marv Weitzenfeld **15 *Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: Hiked west to east from Muddy Creek (Mile 118.7) to FR 736 (mile 130.0); crossed hwy 27 and Irons Fork Creek.

11.3 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 4** **Scenic Rating 3**

This was a long hike, with a tough climb - but there are worse.
Dropped off cars at 736 enroute to Story; all hiked same direction.
FR 736 was so bad, that Jim had to empty his car of all passengers to get across the creek.

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May 6, 2004 **Leader:** Rex Greer **11 *Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: FR 148 to Round Top Trail (114.1 - 124.2) [plus 1.5 mi walk-in]

11.6 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Trail was overgrown, but passable.

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April 1, 2004 **Leader:** Jim Gifford **15 *Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: FR 78 (South cross) to FR 148 (136.1 - 124.2)

11.9 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Beautiful day; Lunch at Iron Fork crossing; cooled our feet in stream at lunch.
Ben & Mike Z shuttled cars, so the rest of us could all walk same direction.

Waterfall Ariel Falls

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Jan 3, 2002 **Leader:** Mike Zeller ***Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: FR148 west across US27 to Round Top Trail [124.2 - 114.1] + walk-out

11.1 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

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Dec 20, 2001 **Leader:** Mike Zeller ***Hikers*** *OMH Thursday (revised)*

Route: Iron Fork Creek to FR 148 [128.8 - 124.2]

4.6 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Completed last week's aborted trip by starting at creek (we could cross today; so got that 100 feet of trail, too)

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Dec 13, 2001 **Leader:** Mike Zeller ***Hikers*** *OMH schedule*

Route: FR 78 (North crossing) to Irons Fork Creek [133.6 - 128.8] and back

9.6 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Intended to go to FR 148; but unable to cross creek due to high water and swift current. The low water bridge was very under water.
Two groups talked and waved across the water and ate lunch at the creek, then turned around and went back the way we came.
Only Polar (Mike's dog) tried to cross -- to get canned chicken from Ben. He was swept away on first try, but made it on second try.
We completed this hike the following week.

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Nov 15, 2001 **Leader:** Martha Doty, Task Master ***Hikers*** *Trail Maintenance / OMH*

Route: FR 78 (North crossing); Spur Trail to Big Branch Shelter and shelter itself (133.6 - 134.0)

2.0 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 4 hours**

Four man work party put in four hours of hard, honest labor - rewarded by David grilling hamburgers at the shelter.

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Oct 4, 2001 **Leader:** Mike Zeller ***Hikers*** *OMH Thursday*

Route: Hwy 298 to FR 78 (Northern Crossing) [138.8 - 133.6] and back

10.4 *miles* **Difficulty Rating 3** **Scenic Rating 3**

Originally planned as a five mile one-way hike (just to get schedule on track), but half group rebelled and turned around for ten mile round trip.