

MISSOURI & ARKANSAS THE OZARKS & TALLGRASS PRAIRIES A NATURAL HISTORY OF AMERICA'S HEARTLAND

MAY 8 – 17, 2009

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“I do not know of anything comparable to the charm of gliding down an Ozark stream,
fast on the riffles, slow and quiet over the pools
with their shimmering reflections of sky and cliff and overhanging foliage.”
- Thomas Hart Benton

The tallgrass prairies and the wooded Ozarks meet in southwestern Missouri where this tour begins. Their charm is gentle, even subtle, but they will richly reward those who take the time to carefully explore them. You won't find either region on tour schedules of any of the big nature tour operators, and if you ask most people about these areas, you'll find that few really know much about them. The tallgrass prairies and the Ozark Mountains are important bio-geographical regions in North America and the beauty and charm of both have gone largely unappreciated.

Richard Rhodes, writing in his book “The Ozarks,” notes that ‘When you say Ozarks, most people think of feuding hillbillies and clandestine stills, barefoot children and potatoes planted in the dark of the moon.’ Such clichés have been fostered by native chroniclers who built careers perpetuating these folksy images, but they do much injustice to this charming wilderness. Behind the facade lies a wilderness that still remains intact despite nearly three centuries of attempts to tame it by human activities. Even persons native to the mid-west are likely to have overlooked the Ozarks. They may have climbed the Rockies, hiked the Cascades, explored the Appalachians or visited Florida before they discovered the Ozarks. This is unfortunate because the Ozarks certainly rival in beauty, if not in scale, the finest wilderness regions in North America.

Those not familiar with the Ozarks may wonder where this little known wilderness lies. It is an enclave of old hills and spring-fed rivers covering most of southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. Its forests stretch from Saint Louis to northwestern Oklahoma, and are bounded on the east by the floodplain of the Mississippi River, on the North by the Missouri River and Sac and Osage River systems, and on the south by the Arkansas River floodplain. The Ozarks give way to tallgrass prairies along a broad diagonal front, stretching from Osceola to Neosho in western Missouri. The Ozark highlands, the only extensive elevated area in the United States between the Appalachian and the Rocky Mountains, consist of low limestone mountains and hills shaped by eons of erosion. The entire region, some 60,000 square miles of it, is tortuously eroded into hills, bluffs and shady forested valleys. Careful observers will note that all of the hill and ridges are of about the same height, and this is the key to the Ozark's geological history. They were never subjected to violent distorting uplifts characteristic of truly mountainous areas. They were not thrust up, but carved down. What we see today in these gentle, forest-clad hills and “hollers” are the eroded remains of a once vast, flat, sea floor.

This trip begins with a day in the tallgrass prairie, the largest and finest one remaining in Missouri. Nearly one-third of the state of Missouri was formerly covered by a lush mantle of tallgrass prairie; in places the grasses grew as high as a horse's shoulders. Today, less than two percent of this once magnificent grassland remains in Missouri. The fate of tallgrass prairies in other states and Canadian provinces is similar, or worse. Only in Kansas can one still find larger stands. We have chosen to visit and explore Missouri's tallgrass prairie for two reasons: first, logistical and second, interpretational. Missouri's Prairie State Park is relatively close to the Ozarks, which means that travel time is kept to a minimum. Second, the 3,500-acre prairie has the finest prairie interpretative center in existence—anywhere—and an excellent set of trails which make exploration of this habitat exceptionally convenient. It offers visitors a chance to see and experience the tallgrass prairie in a way that is simply not possible anywhere else because virtually every link in the prairie ecosystem is present here: from American bison, coyote, Greater Prairie Chicken, Upland Sandpiper, Northern Harrier, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher to prairie mole cricket and prairie crayfish.

The majority of the trip focuses on the Ozarks, on the birds and plants of course, but also on many little-known features of the region—its springs, rivers, waterfalls, grist mills and cultural traditions. You will certainly see and experience the Ozarks in a way that few visitors have before. It is our hope that before this trip is completed, you will fall hopelessly in love with this gentle and beautiful land, just as we have. During the course of the trip we will see and float (for a short distance) one of America's most beautiful rivers, the Buffalo; we will see natural rock bridges, immense limestone bluffs, some of the most spectacular cave formations anywhere in the United States, and some of the most beautiful springs imaginable. But that isn't all, because we'll be visiting during the latter part of spring migration and the woods should be full of warblers. Eighteen species of warblers breed in the Ozarks, almost as many as anywhere else on the continent, and we should see nearly all of them on this trip. Ozark streams are noted for their rich, highly endemic fish fauna. Stream riffles support an amazing assortment of shiners and darters, many of which rival in color the gaudiest of tropical fish. While investigating Ozark stream ecology, we may be able to see some of these amazing little fish. We will see a broad range of plants too—a flora that may surprise you with diversity and beauty, and we hope to be able to show you a few truly rare plants as well.

We intend to make interpretive natural history an important part of this trip as we explore along narrow dirt roads, tramp up secluded canyons, and listen for birds or the sound of waterfalls. We will pause for some cave science, botanize among moist canyons and roadsides, and take time to soak up the gentle beauty of this ancient land, wherever we go. There will even be an opportunity, for those who wish, to spend an evening listening to traditional acoustical music sung and played by some of the Ozarks' finest folk musicians.

After a week in this lovely region, I'm sure you'll see why I've been saying all along, "The Ozarks are the best kept secret in the country."

May 8, Day 1: Arrival in Springfield. Participants may plan to arrive in Springfield, Missouri any time today and check-in at the *Holiday Inn North* where a room will be reserved in your name. The *Holiday Inn North* offers a complimentary airport/hotel shuttle service from the Springfield/Branson Regional Airport, 10 minutes away. Please schedule arrival times early enough so everyone can meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m., and then go to our get-acquainted dinner. We will try to have dinner without delay due to a very early start tomorrow.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn North, Springfield, Missouri

May 9, Day 2: Prairie State Park; Onward to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. We will depart early this morning (about 4:00 a.m.) for Prairie State Park for birding and botany in the tallgrass prairie. This lovely, rolling prairie is the finest remaining Osage Plains tallgrass prairie in Missouri. Greater Prairie Chickens may still be on their display grounds and we will go immediately to their booming grounds, although it is unlikely that we will be able to approach closely or that many birds will still be booming. The park is home to Swainson's Hawks (scarce), Northern Harriers (mainly winter), Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Henslow's and Grasshopper sparrows, and Dickcissels as well as many widespread birds. Henslow's Sparrows should be in full "song" (hic-up) and we'll be listening for them. Occasionally we also see Upland Sandpipers on the prairie. There should be 20 to 30 species of prairie wildflowers in bloom at this time of year, as May is one of the richest flowering periods of the growing season. There will be excellent photographic opportunities for wildflowers throughout the day. After a picnic lunch, we will have a mid-afternoon drive southward to Eureka Springs, and a short driving tour of this remarkable city.

Eureka Springs, sometimes called the "little Switzerland of America," is named for the 63 springs that flow within its city limits. Formerly, people flocked to the city for the supposed therapeutic benefits of its many springs. The city also has been something of an artists' colony for a long time, and the entire downtown region is on the National Historic Register of Historic Places. Streets curve through hollows and up steep hills, and there are very few right angle street corners anywhere in the town.

NIGHT: Comfort Inn, Eureka Springs, Arkansas

May 10, Day 3: Roaring River State Park; Onward to Branson. We will be out early this morning looking for breeding and migrant warblers at Roaring River State Park in southern Missouri. This park is one of the top areas in the western part of the state for migrating warblers, and there are many breeding warblers here as well. The forest on the ridges here consists of black oak, white oak, red oak, post oak, and shagbark hickory growing on cherty slopes. In the richer, protected coves and bottomlands there is basswood, black walnut, white oak, sugar maple, Paw-Paw, Ohio Buckeye, Rusty Black Haw, and eastern hornbeam. The uncommon Ozark Chinquapin (*Castanea ozarkensis*), a relative of the American Chestnut, also occurs in this region. We may see all of these species in the park, as well as many flowering plants including Great Soloman's Seal, False Soloman's Seal, Green Trillium, Virginia Waterleaf, Appendaged Waterleaf, Blue Star, Yellow Honeysuckle, Dwarf Larkspur, Ozark Spiderwort, Horse Gentian, Fire Pink, Blue-eyed Mary and many more. Also, there is a trout hatchery and spring branch nearby, and we will see many fishermen here—they arrive as early as birders!

After lunch in the park we'll continue our exploration of this area, perhaps with a visit to a secluded valley for some more birding and botanizing, or we may continue on toward Branson. On the way to Branson, Missouri, we'll spend the late afternoon at the White River Balds Natural Area (now renamed Ruth Henning State Park) just west of Branson before continuing on to Branson, passing through its now famous "entertainment strip" en route to the hotel. Glades, or balds, are natural openings in the Ozark forest where water and time have worked to erode the thin soil from atop the dolomite bedrock of some hills. The exposed layers of dolomite (limestone high in magnesium) give the glades their characteristic banded pattern. Glades are very dry during most of the year, although they usually have abundant moisture during the spring. Many of the plants in the glades are characteristic of the tallgrass prairies and are well adapted to withstand the rather harsh growing conditions. Spring mornings and evenings are especially lovely in the glades. Many birds, including Cardinals, Indigo Buntings, Prairie Warblers, Blue Grosbeaks and Field Sparrows are in full song. Occasionally, Painted Buntings have arrived by the time of our visit and we may even see a Roadrunner here. In the evenings, Chuck-will's Widows and Whip-poor-wills can be heard in the glades, and nighthawks "beep" and "boom" overhead.

Early pioneers and settlers found the forests of the eastern United States gloomy, even terrifying, because they could not break free of the trees. They welcomed the Ozarks because of the frequent glades (from the Old English "glad," meaning a shining or sunny place), which were natural openings in the forest. Abundant spring rains usually bring a burst of wildflowers to the glades. Pale purple coneflower, Prairie dock, Missouri evening primrose, shooting star, Indian paintbrush, and rose verbena add color on the ground, while the wispy plumes of the pale lavender smoketree blossoms and dogwood (we may be too late for these) and ash juniper freckle the

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landscape. Both the smoketree and the ash juniper are trees of limited distribution, being found mainly in a few counties of southwestern Missouri and adjacent Arkansas. Fence lizards and six-lined race runners are often seen basking on rocks in the glades, and occasionally the striking collared lizard, a desert species here at the eastern limit of its range, can be seen.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Branson, Missouri

May 11, Day 4: Bee Creek. The early morning hours will be devoted to birding and botanizing glades in an area east of Branson, Missouri. This is an excellent area for American Redstart; Hooded, Cerulean and Yellow-throated warbler; and Yellow-breasted Chat. There are also large stands of native cane near the river. Other possibilities include Greater Roadrunner, Blue Grosbeak, Field Sparrow, and various migrant warblers.

For the balance of the morning we'll drive to Harrison, Arkansas, then continue on to a trail in the Buffalo National Wilderness for the afternoon. This is a lovely area for birds and plants, and the trail ends at a large bluff overlooking a waterfall. The forest is oak-hickory and sugar maple on dry slopes. Sometimes the Mountain Azalea is still in bloom, and we will certainly pause to catch the heavenly fragrance of these flowers. Other plants may include Wild Quinine and a variety of oaks, hickories, and sweetgum. If time permits this afternoon, we'll visit Baker Prairie, a 70-acre tallgrass prairie within the city limits of Harrison, Arkansas. Baker Prairie contains a particularly rich association of plants, including the rare Ozark Trillium.

NIGHT: Comfort Inn, Harrison, Arkansas

May 12, Day 5: Upper Buffalo River Country and Ponca Wilderness. We will again spend the early morning hours with breeding warblers and other birds, in the vicinity of the upper Buffalo National River. While hiking this morning, we will encounter several features of geological interest, as well as waterfalls, an enormous bluff cave (an Indian archeological site), and plenty of birds, trees and flowers to identify. The valleys and hillsides ring with the songs of Kentucky and Hooded warblers, Ovenbirds, Louisiana Waterthrushes, American Redstarts, and Black-and-white Warblers. Cerulean Warblers sing from rich bottomlands and Yellow-throated and Parula warblers frequent the tall sycamores. This beautiful mountain region has some of the most rugged scenery on the trip and the forest is older, taller and more lush than most. In the afternoon we will visit a spectacular natural bridge which is located in an area home to many "southern" plants as well, including Umbrella Magnolia, Mountain Azalea, and Dwarf Crested Iris. We also have found the rare Lily Twayblade Orchid and Rattlesnake Plantain Orchid along the Alum Cove Trail. Our route this afternoon will follow Highway 7, which is on the National Register of America's Scenic Highways.

NIGHT: Comfort Inn, Harrison, Arkansas

May 13, Day 6: Floating the Buffalo National River; Onward to Mountain View, Arkansas. If weather and river levels permit, this morning we will float a short and very scenic section of the river in what is probably the very best way to experience the Ozarks. The water is quiet here, gentle as a lamb, with big bass pools, immense limestone bluffs towering hundreds of feet overhead, and a splendid chorus of warblers, Wood Thrushes and other birds. There are a few gentle riffles, but no rapids or "white water" to worry about. We may stop to explore some gravel bars for birds and butterflies. Many visitors consider this the highlight of the trip. (As on all river trips, bring a good waterproof bag for camera and binoculars, and wear an old pair of tennis shoes or reef walkers that can get wet.)

Please note: Although people often express uncertainty about their ability to handle a canoe, we find they are usually surprised at how easy it is to guide one. No previous experience in a canoe is necessary for this trip. If needed, your guide will conduct a short lesson on basic skills, and then everyone will have an opportunity to practice prior to departure. Because the river current pushes the canoe along easily, little effort is required with regard to paddling. We will pull into the river bank occasionally for birds, photography, and other things of interest. If there are persons who do not wish to canoe, we may be able to make available a "John Boat" (flat bot-

tomed) and a local guide. Please advise VENT ahead of time if you require this service. There will be an additional cost for this service (if available).

After our float trip we will travel eastward in the late afternoon through the Buffalo River country to Mountain View, county seat of Stone County, Arkansas. Mountain View is the heartland of Ozark folk culture, and the Folk Center is dedicated to the perpetuation of the unique skills and culture that have survived for two centuries in this region. More than 20 different crafts are demonstrated at the center. Evenings throughout the summer are devoted to folk music. Forgotten instruments such as the mountain dulcimer, hammer dulcimer, pickin' bow, autoharp and mouth harp are joined by more traditional instruments on the town square and at the Folk Center.

NIGHT: Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, Arkansas

May 14, Day 7: Blanchard Springs and the Ozark Folk Center. This will be a morning of birds and botany and caves at Blanchard Springs. The moist valley below the springs is particularly rich in plant species, with the localized yellow-wood trees, musclewood, burning-bush (*Euyonomus*), possumhaw, southern arrow-wood shrubs, climbing milkweeds, leather flowers, columbine, widow's cross, Lyre-leaved Sage (*Salvia*) and much more. It is also a place where I have seen the unusual saprophytic Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), although it is early in the season. We often see Midland Softshell Turtles in nearby Sylamore Creek. Later this morning there will be an underground adventure in Blanchard Springs Cave. Compared to high profile caves such as Mammoth and Carlsbad, the Blanchard Springs Cave system is relatively unknown to the general public. Developed and opened in the early 1970's by the U.S. Forest Service, this cave simply has to rank as one of the most beautiful in the world. The spectacular 100-foot sink-hole entrance thwarted exploration for many years and may be partly responsible for the fact that the cave is so pristine. Protection of the cave is of the highest priority and every precaution has been taken to keep disturbance within the cave to a minimum. Because of this, the cave trip, guided by a Forest Service employee, is a thrilling and beautiful underground experience.

Our afternoon activities will include the option of visiting the Folk Center and talking with people who are experts in traditional crafts including blacksmithing, gun smithing, old-time photography, quilting, printing, doll making, white-oak basket making, candle making, musical instrument construction, canning, and herb gardening, among others. If possible, everyone should try and locate one of the two herbalists at the center. They are sure to provide some surprises in the realm of folk medicine. If time permits, we may also visit the Signal Hill Music Shop or Arkansas Craft Guild on the town square, and take in a few minutes of music being played by local musicians around the square. We will again spend the night in Mountain View, with an optional evening of music at the Ozark Folk Center. Combination tickets for the Folk Center and one music show will be included in your tour price.

NIGHT: Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, Arkansas

May 15, Day 8: Sylamore Creek. Because of the scenic beauty and richness of the Mountain View and Blanchard Springs area, we will spend the morning here again, this time further upstream along Sylamore Creek. A stand of very large short-leaf pines grows in the national forest along Sylamore Creek and the region harbors many breeding wood-warblers. Sylamore is one of the clearest, cleanest-looking streams that I know of anywhere in the Ozarks and its crystal waters hurrying over little ripples are lovely to behold. There may still be a few spring warbler migrants and there couldn't be a lovelier place to spend a morning than here. There is a beautiful, crystal clear swimming hole right by our picnic spot and for those who wish to swim (the water will be cold), it is a great place to cool off or just relax. For botanists, the trail along Sylamore Creek harbors one of the richest and most unusual combinations of plants in the Ozarks as well as some Short-leaf Pines that are surely approaching the dimensions of true old growth forest. Early this afternoon we will drive northward to Mammoth Springs, Arkansas, relocating closer to one of the eastern sections of the Mark Twain National Forest and its magnificent springs.

Late in the afternoon, we will visit Mammoth Springs, just "below" the Missouri border. With a flow rate of about 9.74 million gallons per hour, Mammoth is the second largest spring in the Ozarks (3rd largest spring in the USA and 10th in the world). It has had a long and illustrious human history, including being damned and

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harnessed for power on several occasions. The grounds are peaceful and open, and a good place to see Red-headed Woodpecker, Warbling Vireo, nesting Wood Ducks, migrant warblers, and a good variety of common breeding birds as well.

NIGHT: Mammoth Springs Lodge, Thayer, Missouri

May 16, Day 9: A Day of Springs. This morning we will focus on birding near the Eleven Point River and a visit to several springs, two of which are Missouri Natural Heritage Areas and rank as some of the most beautiful springs anywhere. The first, Greer Springs, has two outlets which are located in a very deep, narrow gorge that represents the former walls of a cave system that collapsed eons ago. The outlets are about 300 feet apart, issuing from Gasconade dolomite. The upper outlet flows from the base of a lovely small cave overhung by vines and shrubs. The lower outlet flows from a circular basin in the rocky stream channel, and the water, milky with dissolved limestone, boils up with great force and makes its way a mile and a quarter to the Eleven Point River. Greer is the third largest spring in the Ozark region, with an average flow of about 9 million gallons per hour (maximum rates exceed 28 million gallons per hour). The location of Greer at the bottom of a deep valley, with springs issuing forth in two places is incomparable—truly one of the gems of the Ozarks. Jack-in-the-Pulpits, maidenhair ferns, walking ferns, bladder nut, eastern hornbeam, leatherwood shrubs and many other interesting plants occur here. Worm-eating Warblers, Ovenbirds and Scarlet Tanagers usually nest on the drier oak-hickory slopes above the springs.

Following an early morning of birding in the bottomlands of the Eleven Point National River and a visit to Greer Springs, we will have lunch at another nearby springs and then drive northward to the Blue Springs Natural Area. Blue Springs is smaller than Greer Springs, although its April to June flow rate is in the neighborhood of 140 million gallons daily, and its yearly average is about 90 million gallons daily. Still, it is very impressive and ranks sixth in the state (Greer's flow of a quarter million gallons a day, ranging up to nearly three-quarters of a million gallons at maximum, places it about 7th or 8th largest in the entire United States). Blue Springs, however, is notable for its extraordinarily deep basin—more than 300 feet—and the remarkable blue tint of its water. Despite its large flow volume, it issues with scarcely a ripple and flows a quarter of a mile into the Current River. According to a local legend, the Indians called this the “spring of the summer sky.” The clarity of this spring, the lovely rock cliffs behind, and the heavy forest cover of this region make Blue Springs one of the most beautiful places in the state. The extensive “canebrakes” along the Current River usually host a small number of breeding Swainson's Warblers and we could have luck seeing this species here. This is often a great site for butterflies as well.

Following birding, botany, and some time to relax and soak up the beauty of this spectacular region, we will drive back to Springfield for the conclusion of our trip. The tour will end tonight with a farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn North, Springfield, Missouri

May 17, Day 10: Departure for Home. Participants may make plans to return home at any time today. A courtesy shuttle is available to transport you from the hotel to the airport.

Note: If you have a “Golden Age Passport” issued by the U.S. Forest Service, we ask that you have your card with you as there are several places throughout the tour where you can benefit.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least **four** months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 7 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Steve Hilty

Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and the recently published *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press. Other credits include *Birds of Tropical America*, *A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*, which has just been republished by the University of Texas Press. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, and is presently preparing the text and species accounts for the tanagers for a forthcoming volume of the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has worked at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, as a consultant to The Nature Conservancy, and as a stockbroker. He is currently a research associate at the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. Since 1975, he has led tours throughout North and South America, and co-led trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With three decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two college age daughters.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2345** per person in double occupancy from Springfield, Missouri. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Springfield and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$405**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. Cancellations received fewer than 90 days before departure date will result in 100% cancellation penalty of the entire tour fee whether previously paid or not. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Between 120 and 90 days before departure
Fewer than 90 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$150.
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
No refund available.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip

cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions are available, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: This tour has frequent hotel changes, an unavoidable consequence of geography and the natural areas that we plan to visit. With this in mind, we suggest that for your own enjoyment and ease of travel, you pack efficiently and do not bring excessively large luggage. We suggest one medium-sized bag and a carry-on. This trip is relatively short and there will be no severely cold weather, so you will probably be happiest with less rather than more.

CLOTHING: Field clothing will be appropriate for all daily activities (at least three complete changes, including 4 or 5 shirts are recommended per trip). As nights and early mornings may still be cool, a moderate-weight jacket and sweater should be sufficient. Evening dress will be casual throughout. The lows will be in the 50s and highs in the 80s. Bring a good sun hat and a rain coat, as well as footwear appropriate for walking on trails and occasionally on uneven, rocky terrain (i.e., one pair of sturdy walking shoes or good sneakers). We also recommend having an extra pair of old sneakers or reef walkers that you can use for walking in shallow water during the float trip. We suggest you bring water resistant/water proof shoes/boots. There are many Gore-Tex types that would be suitable. Rubber boots or a pull-over type may be useful on the first day if the prairie is wet, but will not be needed for the remainder of the trip. REI sells a nice tote that goes over shoes. A swimsuit may be handy at some hotels and perhaps on the river.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). You will need a small backpack (daypack) for the canoe trip. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope (for use mainly the first day). Participants do not need to bring a scope. You should also bring a camera, an alarm clock, field notebook and pens, and a small field shoulder pack or back pack. A canteen or water bottle may be useful. Be sure to bring several strong plastic bags that can be used to protect cameras and binoculars against rain, and also while on the river. Bring a good sunscreen or sun-block.

HEALTH: Participants on this trip will enjoy the region and be able to take full advantage of all our activities if they are in reasonably good physical condition and able to walk a round-trip trail (on a good forest trail) of about 3 miles. While still a bit early, during this season we may encounter a few ticks and chiggers. A pump insect repellent works well for both, as does the combination of rubber boots and flowers of sulfur (a powder available at most drug stores). Topsy gel and some cortisone creams are available without prescription and may be useful for reducing irritation from insect bites. For tick protection, treat pants (especially) with Pyrethrum (available from ABA sales, also from most bait and tackle shops).

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. If you

suffer from motion sickness, you may wish to bring an appropriate medication. Ozarks roads have a lot of curves, although we will do our best to smooth the ride.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

ALCOHOL: Please note that alcoholic beverages can be purchased at our first three hotels (Springfield; Eureka Springs; Branson) but the next four nights we will be in dry counties with no access to alcohol, nor at the restaurant in Mammoth Springs, Arkansas on the fifth night. We will offer an opportunity to purchase alcoholic drinks prior to entering these dry counties.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

General Background

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