

This article was written a few years ago, so it may not be totally accurate today. But it gives the flavor of Arcadia Valley.

Arcadia Valley Day Trip—A Fort, Food, and Antiques

If high gas prices have curbed your vacation plans, or hurricanes down South have blown your long-range vacation plans, you might consider taking more day or short-range trips in our area. My husband and I took such a trip last Saturday to the Arcadia Valley.

The Valley is an area covering the towns of Pilot Knob, Ironton, and Arcadia, one flowing seamlessly into another. It was one of those crisp October Saturdays when the trees are starting to turn, and it is a perfect day for a road trip. The trip from start to finish covered just over 150 miles.

Most people go to the area to visit one of the areas parks and recreation areas such as Elephant Rocks State Park, Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park, or the Taum Sauk Mountain Park. These and other natural sites in the area are worth visiting and revisiting, but these sites were not our destination on this day.

The original purpose of the trip was to visit the Fort Davidson State Historic Site in Pilot Knob where a Visitor Center is located, along with the physical site of the battle where General Sterling Price's and General Thomas Ewing's troops met in battle. It is this battle and the subsequent retreat, which is covered in Viva Cuba's recent series of Civil War murals. Since Viva Cuba, of which I am a member, is increasingly being requested to do narrated mural tours for various groups, I thought a visit to the source of the battle was a good idea.

However, I had also read a short article some months ago that mentioned antiques and good restaurants in the area. I found that as eating and shopping are among my favorite activities. We found that the Arcadia Valley is a striking natural setting for interesting attractions and people. Pilot Knob and Arcadia each have populations of around 700 and Ironton is twice that.

Our first stop in the valley was in Pilot Knob at the Fort Davidson Historic Site, which covers about 80 acres. The attractive Visitor Center houses exhibits, many photos, and information about the Battle of Pilot Knob that occurred at the fort in September 1864. Site administrator Brick Autry, who has visited Cuba's Civil War murals, is the curator and provided us information about the site. In 2007, there will be another anniversary re-enactment of the battle. As this is also Cuba's 150th anniversary, we discussed doing some joint advertising of the events.

Inside the center is an active diorama that shows the geography of the area. When site employee Chris Warren set it in operation, columns of small colored lights represented moving troops of the Union and Confederate armies. During the taped narration, the lights move where the troops moved during the battles and retreat. This helps make the details of the battle more understandable. Also on display at the center is one of the Ketchum grenades that can be seen flying through the air in Cuba's Fort Davidson mural panel.

Outside the center are the remains of the earthen fort that was blown up during General Ewing's retreat. One can stand on the ramparts and look down into the crater that was the result of exploding the fort's gunpowder so that it wouldn't fall into Confederate hands. The dry moat that the Confederate troops tried to breach still circles the fort. Retreating forces arranged their Union dead in the fort so that the exploding earth would cover their bodies and keep them free from scavenging Confederate troops, who were always looking for clothing, food, and ammunition.

After we left Pilot Knob, we drove down Hwy. 21 to S. Main at Ironton and stopped at a couple of antique stores where we struck a fountain of information from Dale and Sandy Brown, who run Stout's Creek Trading Company. The trading company is in a building that was formerly the town's drug store. It was filled with room after room of antiques, which were well arranged in clean

surroundings, which antique lovers know is not always the case. This was pretty typical of all the stores we visited.

One interesting fact was that there seems to be a connection to the movies in Ironton. We learned that a horror movie had recently been filmed in Ironton at the old Ironton hospital. The Browns told us that Larry Misselhorn, a carpenter who builds sets for major movies, such as *Message in a Bottle*, *Runaway Bride*, also owns the antique store Glory Days Emporium & Museum next door. He and his wife were married on the set of *Nell*. He is now in Baton Rouge working on the set of Hillary Swank's latest movie.

When we visited the Glory Days, my husband discovered while talking to Shelia Misselhorn that the counter was from the set in the movie *Road to Perdition*. The store, again, provided rooms of antiques, displays, yard statuary, and items too numerous to mention.

The Browns also related some facts about the Arcadia Academy, a 17-acre campus of a former girls academy, which was run by the Ursuline nuns from 1878 to 1971. The campus holds massive historical buildings and is located down Hwy. 21 in Arcadia. Turn left on Maple and go until you reach the stone columns by the drive.

The Browns told us that Fidel Castro's niece and Bob Hope's daughter attended the Academy. Besides the first-rate education that the nuns provided, the remote area also kept the girls safe from kidnapping, which was a problem at the time. Several daughters of South American dictators also attended the school. Reunions of class members are still held at the campus.

Today, several businesses are operated in the buildings on the Academy campus: The Abbey Kitchen, The Academy Bed & Breakfast, Nostalgia Place Bed & Breakfast, The Hen House Antiques, and the Sanctuary Salon & Spa. The St. Joseph Chapel, with amazing stain glass windows, is used for weddings, as well as religious services. Tours of the grounds and buildings are available. It's worth the trip to see the buildings and campus.

We ate on campus at the Abbey Restaurant. They do their own baking of rolls, desserts, and bread. Their flour is ground fresh daily, and as we ate, many people came in to pickup special orders or take home some of the bread to sample after their lunch. Homemade soups are a specialty, and the roast beef was recommended to us. Our homemade sandwich rolls were delicious. And part of cinnamon roll had to be boxed for home consumption.

After lunch we visited the upper floor of the restaurant building where there was a vast array of antiques with some rooms organized by themes, such as the "mantique" room.

Then we went next door to a separate brick building, which had at one time been the laundry and housing for staff. It is now Nostalgic Place Bed & Breakfast and also sells some antiques. It has recently won a preservation award and is a beautiful building. We toured the one suite and two rooms that are available for overnight stays. They were all well done and inviting. There is also a large common room where a full breakfast is served and special events occur. It is a large building, and the retired teacher who was manning the desk that day said the girls at the school were given three formal meals a day and that there was always a lot of laundry to be done. The owners live onsite on the third floor of the building.

After this stop and taking some pictures of the campus, we retraced our drive back through Arcadia, Ironton, and Pilot Knob, to the Caledonia and Potosi route. As we passed, we looked longingly at the Kozy Korner café in Ironton. Dale Brown had recommended their coconut cream "mile high" pie. But it was not to be on this trip.

Although the towns nestled among a range of mountains are remote from an interstate highway, you will find large, old houses and great buildings as a result of the prosperity that mining brought to the area. The nearby granite also provided great building materials for rock additions or construction. The St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad shipped iron ore to market.

Arcadia Valley's remote location keeps it a little less reliant on the outside world and provides a strong environment for the hardworking, independent businessperson, which creates a unique area of shops and history. Tourism is important to the town.

There are two routes to and from Cuba and Pilot Knob, and we traveled them both, one going and one coming. Both routes are relatively billboard free and provide great views of a rolling countryside into the historic mining towns. If you like a scenic, winding road, take Hwy. 19 to Steelville and then to Cherryville. Next, take Hwy. 49 to Hwy. 32 at Bixby. Go east and make a right onto Route 21 into Pilot Knob.

However, if such winding roads make you queasy and break out into a sweat as they do me, I recommend taking Hwy 8 to Potosi and then a right onto Hwy. 21 to Caledonia into Pilot Knob. The road through Caledonia and Potosi also has other antique stores along the route. This is also the route that General Ewing's troops took when they retreated from Pilot Knob. I doubt if they paused for antiques.

If this trip sounds like a little too much antiquing for you, there is also a nine-hole golf course, the parks, the Arcadia Valley Music Show, Chanticleer Pottery, and many other shops and attractions. B&Bs, hotels, and motels accommodate a longer stay. It is an area rich for a day visit or an overnight one. Because of its many attractions, the area can be visited again and again.

In the 1800s, the poet Longfellow wrote of the area, "There is a charming portion of our country, dainty and lovely as a dimple in the cheek of nature and yet comparatively unknown to residents in the East. It is the valley of Arcadia."

As for me, I will return to the area, and when I do, I am going straight to the Kozy Korner Café for that "mile high" pie.

For a broad range of information about the area including businesses: www.arcadiavalley.biz provides the names and information of local attractions, businesses, and history of the area. You can also call 573-546-7117. Information is available at ironcounty.org. For Academy information visit www.ArcadiaAcademy.com or call the office and restaurant at 573-546-4249. For Fort Davidson information and other park information visit www.mostateparks.com or call Fort Davidson at 573-546-3454. Group tours are available, but the site is closed on Mondays in January and February.