

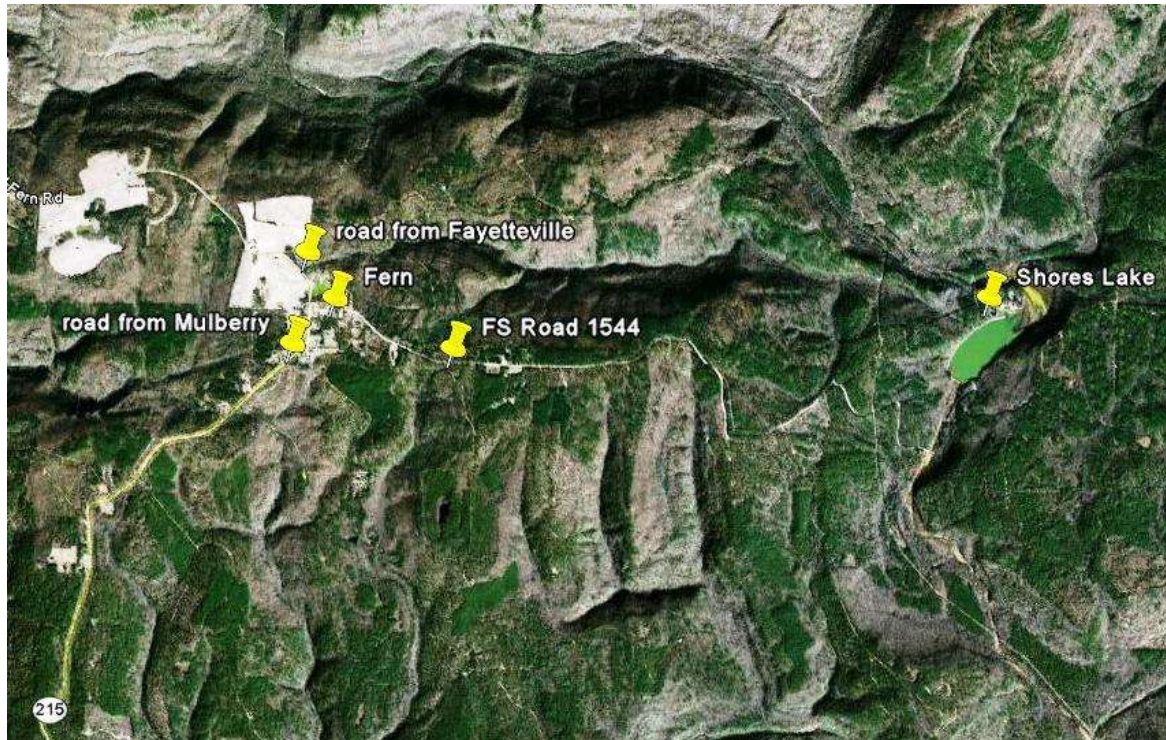
SHORES LAKE AND FERN in the OZARK NATIONAL FOREST

Shores Lake and the crossroads community of Fern are located in the Ozark National Forest in Franklin County. If you are looking at an Arkansas highway map, note the town of Mulberry on I-40 east of Fort Smith. From Mulberry state highway 215 (paved) goes north into the Ozark NF, soon reaching Fern and then Shores Lake. This area, with its big stands of mature, native shortleaf pine (and younger stands), is one of the real gems in our part of the state.



Folks traveling north from I-40 will turn at Mulberry, then head north on 215 toward Shores Lake. This is a simple and straight forward path. Folks from Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers area can go a different route if “scenic” is on the agenda.

From Fayetteville I have traveled down old 71, then east on state 348 just south of Mountainburg (see map). You get to the end of 348, then the highway assumes several local names; fear not! Just keep heading east. Old 71 and 348 provide a leisurely way to see the magnificent Boston Mountains. The 16 miles from old 71 to Fern & Shores Lake wind and turn, climb and descend, both in elevation and in time. It looks pretty modern near Mountainburg, but further east & deeper into the old hills is the feel & look of an older Arkansas: homes with big porches & yards full of old time varieties of simple flowering daffodils. The previous generations also set out yuccas and these grace many of the older yards.



Here are some notes from a trip in March 2010: The huge shortleaf pine stands along 215 south of Fern host Wild Turkeys and in the spring many flocks of American Goldfinches; I'm sure I saw 200. There were goldfinches up in the small cones & goldfinches seeking tiny seeds in ripe sweetgum balls. A Sharp-shinned Hawk flew across the highway carrying prey about half the hawk's size. Pine Warblers are in full song. Eastern Towhees were "che-winking" in the thickets around timber harvest areas. Purple Finches were probing the newly blossomed tree flowers in the bottoms at Shores Lake. And as I watched them, a Barred Owl called from the ridge. Witch hazel was still in bloom along the creek at Shores Lake.

Bill Beall, veteran birder from Ft Smith who had studied birds in western Arkansas for many decades, has been the NWAAS field trip leader in the Fern area. We look for Brown-headed Nuthatches and other birds typical of pine forests. The Shores Lake area is one of the few spots in the Ozarks where these nuthatches still occur, but finding them is not assured. One of the places where he has found them most consistently has been along Forest Service road 1544, just east of Fern on the way to Shores Lake. There are shortleaf pine stands in various age classes all along the road, so the birding can be very good. During an NWAAS field trip in March 2010, we found Brown-headed Nuthatches nesting in a broken off pine snag along 215 south of Fern.

Shores Lake itself is a very interesting spot to visit. There are trails, a campground, the lake, riparian habitat, mature hardwoods and pines.

For NWAAS field trips we usually meet up at the picnic area entrance on the west side of Shores Lake. Just as you get to Shores Lake, notice the sign that indicates the left fork for "Shores Lake -1, Camping, White Rock 7."



(Prepared by Joe Neal November 2010)