

The Southern United States



April-May, 2011

Bob and Molly Hillery

Bob's brother, Geoffrey, came to visit us in Cincinnati for a couple of days prior to us taking a driving trip through the Southern States of America. We visited eleven states in all—Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. Admittedly, some states were little more than a “drive-through” and we literally only set a foot in Virginia, but we did get a sampling of the Confederate States and life in the more leisurely south.

We saw (through the mist) the Great Smoky Mountains and the impressive hills and lakes of Tennessee; the rolling countryside of Alabama and Mississippi and the contrasting styles of New Orleans. We caught glimpses of the Gulf Coast and visited the oldest city in America, St Augustine. Finally we saw the beautiful Ante Bellum homes and gardens of Savannah and Charleston and learned a little of the cities' involvement in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

Southern States, April 2011

Monday April 18

After Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha left following their visit to Ohio, Molly and I cleaned up the condo in preparation for Geoffrey's visit. We met him at Cincinnati airport at 6:30 where he arrived on time after an uneventful flight. He was wide awake and ready to eat so we went to Outback near our house before retiring.

Tuesday April 19

Geoffrey was up bright and early and we had breakfast at home before he and I took a two mile walk in the neighborhood. It had been very stormy overnight and we ran into a few showers on our walk but it was nevertheless a pleasant interlude.

We went to Ruby Tuesday's for lunch before a visit to Home Depot and then a relaxing afternoon at home. In the evening we visited Elizabeth and family for a drink and then went to Café Bella for dinner.

Wednesday April 20



After breakfast at Bob Evans with Elizabeth, Geoffrey and I spent the rest of the day (six hours in all) at the National Air Force Museum in Dayton. The museum is vastly bigger than the last time I had visited and the many exhibits related to flight from the Wright Brothers to the space shuttle made for a very interesting visit.

In the evening Elizabeth and Chip joined us for dinner at the Brown Dog Café.

Thursday April 21

It was a bright, sunny morning – but still cool – as we had breakfast and then packed everything in the car for our first day on the road. We drove south on I-75 and had our first coffee stop about 15 miles south of the Ohio River in Kentucky. Then we drove on through the Kentucky rolling hills and horse farms as far as Berea where we stopped for a light lunch at a Cracker Barrel restaurant. The “hillbilly” ambience of the attached shop and the café itself provided some interest and amusement to Geoffrey as well as to Molly and me.

After lunch we drove further down I-75 as far as Corbin where we left the expressway and turned east towards Cumberland Gap. It was about 40 miles to the National Park at which point we drove about 3 miles up a very steep and twisty road in the park to the Pinnacle Overlook. This overlook provided some spectacular views of the surrounding valley and hills of three states – Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky

– and we had a bird’s eye view of the Cumberland Gap itself.



Visitor Center—Cumberland Gap



The Gap was one of very few cuts in the Appalachian Mountains and had been first a migrating buffalo track, then an Indian path before it became the primary route for settlers and pioneers alike as the newly formed United States expanded. Cumberland Gap allowed travelers to head west to the fertile plains of Ohio and beyond and also provided a relatively easy return route for goods headed to the more populated

east coast, and presumably in some cases back to Europe.

By the time we were at the summit in the park (around 4 pm) the temperature had risen to 70F and it was still bright so not only did we have spectacular views but we had very mild and pleasant conditions in which to enjoy them.



From Cumberland Gap we drove directly to our hotel just a little east of Knoxville. However, the route took us through some beautiful forested scenery which occasionally opened up to provide a panoramic view of the rivers and lakes of this part of Tennessee, all of which are part of the very extensive Tennessee River Valley Authority which provides hydro-electric power for this area and well beyond.

We arrived at the hotel right on 7pm and, after a short rest break, re-convened for dinner. Tonight we ate at a local Italian Steak and Seafood restaurant (Puelo's) which was quite good although difficult to imagine that it had been voted "Best restaurant in Knoxville".

Friday April 22

We were up about 8 on an overcast morning and had breakfast in the hotel. We then set out on our drive through the Smoky Mountains. First, however, we had to negotiate the rather gaudy tourist traps of Pigeon Forge (home of Dollywood) and Gatlinburg. Actually, Gatlinburg didn't seem quite as bad as we had remembered it, although it is still not calling us to a week's vacation.

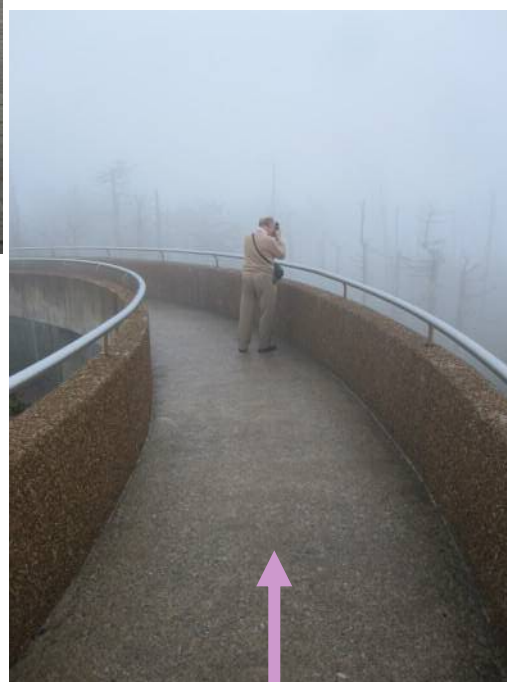


Once through Gatlinburg we were in the National Park where our first call was at the Visitor Center to pick up maps, etc. Then we started the climb on the west side of the mountain. a

Loop road to gain height in the Park.

Our road crosses the top of the bridge.

The weather had improved as we had driven from the hotel to Gatlinburg and we thought that perhaps we might actually have some good views as we reached the summit near the North Carolina border. However, the clouds soon were down to road level and panoramic vistas were reduced to an occasional glimpse through the trees as a patch of cloud suddenly lifted or was blown away for a few minutes.



I wonder how that one came out!

We did take the drive that leaves the main through road to reach the very summit at Clingman's Dome - or at least the highest point reachable by car. Here the cloud completely engulfed us and it was about 20F cooler than what we had left in the valley. Geoffrey and I did opt for the remaining half mile walk to the observation deck in the vain hope that we would somehow get above the clouds or at least there would be a few breaks. This was not to be and it was quite difficult to see even from bottom to top of the circular concrete walkway that leads to the observation point. However, we can claim to have been at the highest point in Tennessee at an altitude of 6640 feet.

We came down the mountain on the North Carolina (east) side and into the Indian reservation at Cherokee. The Cherokee Indians had been herded from here by the US Government in the mid-1800s and those now populating the reservation are mostly the descendants of the 1000 who hid in the mountains to avoid deportation. The reservation now boasts a casino which brings in revenues of \$7000 per person per year – for every member of the Tribe. So, perhaps a little compensation for those whose land was taken away 150 years ago.

We had a Burger King lunch (Cherokee doesn't have a great deal to offer – no Starbucks, for example) and then set off towards Chattanooga.

The road we followed skirted the Smoky Mountains on the east and then southern edge of the National Park.

The scenery all the way to Chattanooga was quite spectacular and very beautiful in parts. There were some grand views of the forested mountains to the south and east, some impressive gorges and quite a number of Whitewater Rivers on which we saw several rafts and kayaks. The sun had come out by this time and the temperature was pushing 80F so we saw a swing of almost 40 degrees in one day.



We didn't make any stops along this route except to watch a few rafters risk limbs in the fast-flowing river but it was a very pleasant ride under ideal conditions. The final 20 miles were on expressway which took us right to the downtown Marriott, our destination for the day. It's perhaps a pity that the views from the mountain were not what we would have liked, but then, to visit the Smoky Mountains and not see some of the mist and clouds which gave them their name may also have seemed a let down.



For convenience tonight we ate in the restaurant at the hotel, after enjoying a half bottle of wine and some fruit, courtesy of the hotel.

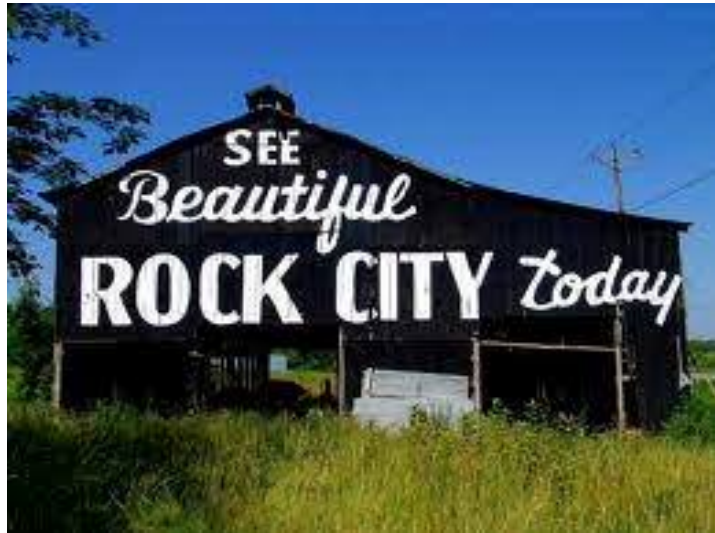
Saturday April 23

It was dull but mild as we ate breakfast in the hotel but it promised to be a warm and sunny day later. We decided to “do” Lookout Mountain before heading south to our next stop in Meridian, MS.



Lookout Mountain is the southernmost mountain of the Appalachian Range and rises very steeply to about 2200 feet directly alongside the city center of Chattanooga. The mountain is actually about 50 miles long and straddles Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama and has a number of attractions close to Chattanooga, the most famous of which is Rock City. In fact, all over the southern USA are billboards and other advertising media encouraging the tourist to “Visit Rock City”. However, as with so many things, it’s “cheaper” to buy a three-in-one pass that allows visits to Rock City, Ruby Falls and a trip on the Incline Railway that connects Chattanooga to the mountain top.

So, we bought the package and made our first stop at Ruby Falls. This is a 165 feet high waterfall inside a large cave about ½ mile inside the mountain. After a brief discussion with the ticket clerk about the “tightness” of the route, Bob opted out of this particular excursion and spent a little over an hour at the overlook area while Geoffrey and Molly took the tour. They both found it very interesting and the waterfall self was impressive (especially with the various lighting effects) but the walk there and back was quite arduous and was indeed through some very narrow and low spots in rock wall.



it-



*Ruby
Falls*

Next stop, just a few miles further along the plateau that is the mountain top, was at the Incline Railway. This is a two car cable system which covers just less than one mile and, as they said, “goes straight up the mountain side”. In fact, the last $\frac{1}{4}$ mile has the steepest grade of any railway in the world, a little steeper than 70%. Although used by locals to get from town to the mountain top (where there are some beautiful housing developments and huge homes) the cable car was built as a tourist attraction over a hundred years ago and that is still its primary use. Despite its steepness it doesn’t inspire sense of awe as many similar constructions do and the journey down and up was interesting and had some great views but was certainly not a thrill ride.



Our final stop was at Rock City itself. The area is named for the rock formations at the very edge of the precipitous drop to the valley below and was the brain child of a couple who owned the property as part of their estate. It was designed in the 1930s as a walking path through, under, over and between rock formations. The design is maintained to this day and a series of pathways of various degrees of difficulty meander through the rocks and gardens to the “Lovers Leap” at the tip of the property at a point from which seven states can be seen (on a clear day). There are a couple of very narrow walkways between vertical rock faces which almost converge twenty feet above the path such that those who suffer from claustrophobia (or indeed an overweight condition) have some degree of difficulty negotiating. Overall, however, the area is very well laid out and on a sunny, warm day such as we now had, it is a very pleasant way to spend an hour or two.

1823 – Drawn by amazing tales, sightseers came and rode mules through the naturally formed “streets and avenues” of the place they nicknamed Rock City.

1928 – Frieda Carter spent four years forging a path through the wilderness among the rock formations with only a string to mark her trail. Garnet Carter introduced her unique gardens to the public as Rock City Gardens in 1932.

1936 – Garnet Carter began his famous barn roof advertising campaign to lure vacationers from the highways. By the 1950’s Clark Byers had painted “See Rock City” on 900 barn roofs from Michigan to Texas.



Rock City



As we left Lookout Mountain (following a light lunch sitting outside at Starbucks) it was already approaching 3pm and we still had an almost 300 mile drive to our next stop. However, it was expressway for the entire journey and we made only one quick stop for gas so we were in Meridian, Mississippi in 4 ½ hours. In addition, we had crossed into the Central Time Zone, thereby gaining an hour so we were still able to get to a local Red Lobster restaurant for dinner at a reasonable hour. The road through Alabama and into Mississippi ran through forested rolling hills for the entire journey which made for very pleasant scenery throughout.

Sunday April 24 (Easter Sunday)

We had breakfast in the hotel (a very nice Hilton Garden Inn) and then set off south through Mississippi to the Louisiana border. Again the route was forested but it steadily became flatter as we got further south; it was, nevertheless, a very pleasant drive.



We stopped at the border with Louisiana for a light Starbucks lunch and then drove west a little so that we entered New Orleans via the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway – a twenty mile road built about 20 feet above the lake.

Once in New Orleans we easily found the Marriott on Canal Street (using the GPS) and said goodbye to the car for a couple of days. We plan to spend our time in the city walking primarily in the French Quarter so we had no need for the car here.

Once settled in, Geoffrey and I went for a short walk down to the Mississippi River before relaxing until dinner time. By now the weather had really warmed up into the mid 80s, but so far the humidity was not too high.

Tonight we had a very nice meal at Brennan's, including their invention of Bananas Foster. We walked back to the hotel on a part of Bourbon Street for a change of pace!

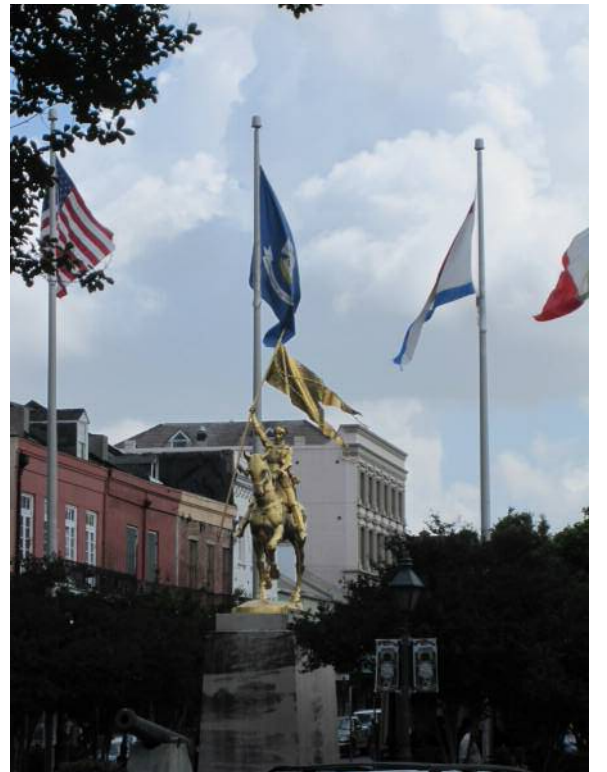
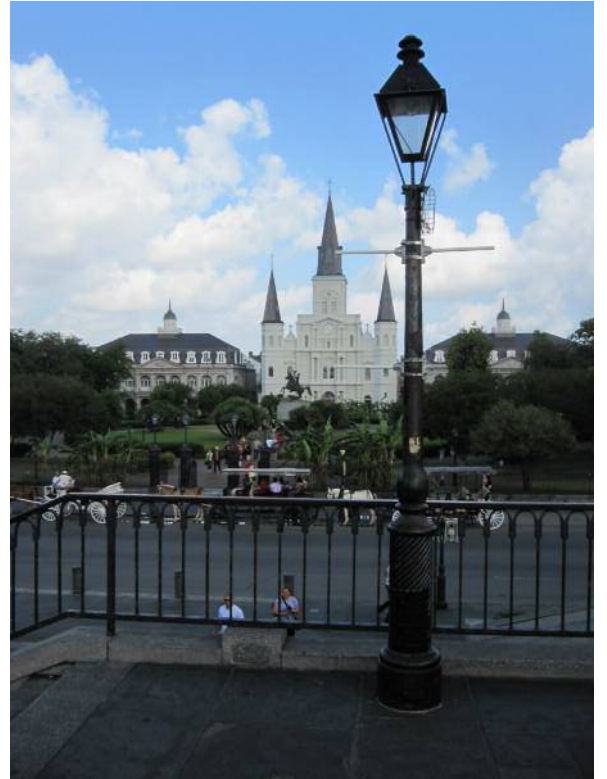
Monday April 25

We had breakfast in the Concierge Lounge and then set out on our walking tour of the French Quarter. We first walked directly to Jackson Square to get a tour brochure from the Tourist Information Center and then did the area around the square, the riverfront and the French Market. The market had the usual souvenir items as well as a very attractive food area which included an enormous selection of hot sauces.



Through the French Quarter to Jackson Square





This statue of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, was a gift from the people of France



*St Louis Cathedral from the waterfront,
Joan of Arc Statue (above) and French*

Continuing from the market, we passed the 1727 Ursuline Convent, one of the oldest structures in the Mississippi Valley. Also in this part of the Quarter were a number of houses from the 1800s, each of which had its own story and history of famous occupants. New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory have an interesting history, having been governed successively by France, Spain, France again, the United States, the Confederate States and finally the United States once more. The Cabildo, built by the Spanish in 1779, was the seat for all these governments and was also the building in which France ceded the territory of the Louisiana Purchase to the United States in 1803, thus opening up the entire western half of the new country.



Having walked around a four by four block area we were back at Jackson Square at what seemed like an opportune time to visit the famous Café du Monde for coffee (chicory flavored as is common in New Orleans) and the powdered sugar beignets. This is a tradition for visitors to the city and results in every eater being almost covered in white powder, especially today as a stiff breeze was blowing in the open air café.



Duly refreshed, we continued our walk around the cathedral area. St Louis Cathedral is the oldest cathedral in the United States and in 1964 was dedicated by Pope Paul VI as a minor basilica. The inside is somewhat restrained by European Cathedral standards but is very bright and has some rather fine paintings, particularly on the ceiling.



*St Louis Cathedral
and the Cabildo*

The remainder of our walk took us primarily along Royal Street where once again we saw many period pieces from both the Spanish and French eras and some very fine examples of the wrought iron railings around balconies which are characteristic of many buildings in the French Quarter. Many of the architects or original owners incorporated their initials in the iron work of the homes. Each home identified in our brochure had a story – perhaps it was said to be haunted, or was occupied by a prominent person from the various governments, or – in one case – was offered to Napoleon as an alternative to his place of exile in Europe.



In addition to the history and the architecture, Royal Street – at least in the daytime – is home to many street musicians and we spent a very pleasant half hour listening to a very good and entertaining nine piece Dixieland jazz band. We then dragged our tired feet back to the hotel around mid-afternoon for a little rest and relaxation as well as a swim in the pool.

Tonight we had another very good meal at the Court of Two Sisters, sitting under the trees in the courtyard on a very pleasant evening.

Tuesday April 26



After a leisurely breakfast in the hotel we strolled to the river and bought tickets for the 11:30 sailing of the Steamer “Natchez”. This is one of the few remaining true sternwheelers powered by steam and, as the narrator was quick to point out, driven only by the rotating paddle wheel at the stern of the ship.



The two hour cruise took us down river towards the Gulf of Mexico (which surprisingly is 110 river miles away) past the French Quarter and the various docks that make up the Port of New Orleans, which we were told is the largest in the world in terms of tonnage that passes through. We saw a number of ocean-going vessels from ports around the world which were unloading (mostly steel) or loading (grain) their cargo. There were also a number of US Navy ships near the rather large naval base on the western side of the river.



*New Orleans
from the
Mississippi
River*



Battle of New Orleans Site

We also saw the canal that connects the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain and thence to the intra-coastal waterway of the Gulf and the Eastern Seaboard. It was part of the levee system in the canal that was breached during Hurricane Katrina and which resulted in the devastation of the Ninth Ward. We could just see the rooftops of house left standing and it was very clear how easily any breach would cause flooding as the street is about 15 feet below river level at this point.

After about 50 minutes the Natchez turned around and we retraced our steps back to the center of town. During this portion of the cruise, we visited the engine room and enjoyed a drink on the upper deck on what was now a very bright but windy day.

After a light lunch of gumbo we walked to the St Charles Avenue streetcar and took a ride through the Garden District to the end of the line.



The Garden District

Once out of the city center, St Charles Avenue runs through a very rich residential district with beautiful, large homes built with plantation money about a hundred years ago. Most of the homes appear still to be single residences so clearly there is still a wealthy population in this city. The homes were built by “Americans” to provide an alternative (and perhaps a little “one-upmanship”) to the Spanish homes of the French Quarter. Certainly they are magnificent stone and brick buildings with well-manicured gardens and the drive through (on an old and rather noisy streetcar) provided us with a relaxing way to spend the afternoon.

Dinner tonight was at a New Orleans tradition – Galatoire’s on Bourbon Street. It is apparently the place to “be seen” and insists on jackets for men. It was packed, and as they don’t take reservations, we had a 15 minute wait for a table. The food was good and the service the same but I think we all felt it a little too noisy for easy conversation and perhaps not as good a place as those we had enjoyed the previous two evenings in the city. But, it gave us a taste of the old world New Orleans cuisine and ambience.

Wednesday April 27

We had breakfast in the hotel and then left New Orleans by way of Interstate 10 East. This quickly crossed the eastern edge of Louisiana, then a narrow section of Mississippi, an equally small tip of Alabama and into the western Florida panhandle.



We could have covered almost the entire 300 miles to our Panama City Beach destination on this route but decided instead to take a short break from Expressway and dip down to the Gulf Coast in Mississippi. Here we passed through a number of resort towns, including Biloxi, that were right on the edge of narrow sandy beaches. There was a very strong wind blowing from the Gulf and this had partially covered the roadway in fine sand in many places causing slowdowns much the same as

snowdrift might. In fact there were large crews of trucks and backhoes scraping the road clear of the sand although it seemed to be a never-ending task as the gale kept blowing.

We had a light lunch near Mobile, Alabama and then continued via I-10 until we were into Florida and only about 40 miles from our destination. It was then a much slower two lane highway all the way to the Bay Point Marriott – a golf resort right on the Gulf. We arrived a little before 6pm and reconvened for our pre-dinner drink about 7. We ate in one of the restaurants on site rather than try to seek out others in the Panama City area. It was still very windy and rain was predicted for later in the evening.

Thursday April 28

It turned out that there was no rain overnight and as we ate breakfast in the hotel the sun came out and it promised to be a bright day. We had a long journey ahead and re-entry in to the Eastern Time Zone so a loss of an hour en route to St Augustine, Florida.

The drive from Panama City Beach to Interstate 10 (about 50 miles) was very pleasant and indeed stayed that way along the expressway. The interstate roads in this part of the country are tree-lined on the sides and in the broad medians so it is like driving on a one way road through dense forest.

The weather was still warm and sunny as we stopped near Tallahassee for a light lunch (outside) but shortly afterwards it clouded over considerably. About 60 miles from Jacksonville we went through a huge thunderstorm with torrential rain. In fact we pulled off the road a couple of times but, of course, it appeared to let up as soon as we did. However, we went through several miles of very slow driving but fortunately none of the tornadoes that have plagued the states to the north all this week.

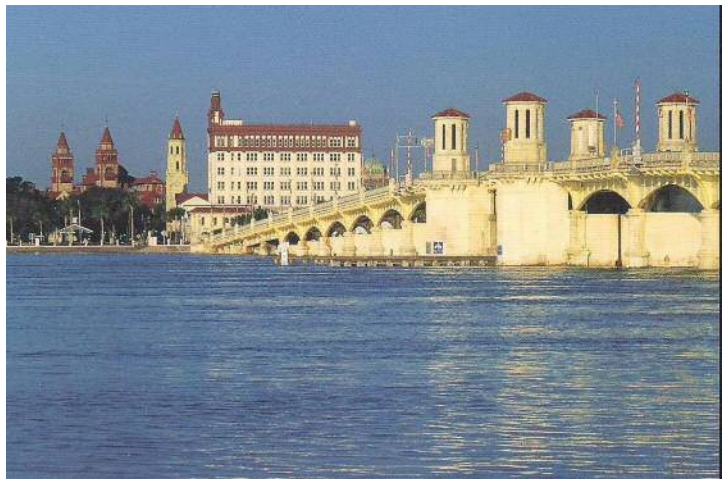
We arrived in St Augustine around 5pm and checked into our hotel in the old downtown area and we were looking forward to spending time in the Historic District tomorrow. The hotel – the well established and beautifully appointed Casa Monica – is new to the Marriott chain and only a few blocks from the downtown area. We also had a super meal in the hotel restaurant, taking advantage of the four course sampler menu with wine.

Friday April 29

We had breakfast in the hotel on a beautiful sunny morning with a cooling breeze keeping the temperature very pleasant.

After checking out, we drove a few blocks to the Visitor Information Center from where we started our walk through the historic district and along the waterfront of the Intra Coastal Waterway.

We first walked to the old fortress, the Castillo de San Marcos, which was built beginning in 1672 to protect Spain's interests in the New World. We didn't go into the fort but continued along the waterfront to



the “Lion Bridge”, the lions referencing Ponce de Leon, the city's founder. His statue stands just across the road from the bridge in its own square.





St Augustine, Florida.

Oldest City in The United States

Further from the water we passed the very attractive Cathedral Basilica of St Augustine, supposedly America's first parish. However, since it dates from 1865 one must assume that some churches in New England might challenge that claim.

Finally we walked through the old Spanish Quarter which dates back to the mid 1700s and has several old and/or reconstructed buildings of the era. However, most of the buildings today are souvenir shops or small cafes serving the large number of tourists who visit St Augustine.

We left the city and crossed the intra Coastal Waterway to drive on the outer bank for about 30 miles. Along this route are hundreds of homes and condominiums (presumably mostly rented as vacation homes) which sit right on the sea shore in beautifully landscaped surroundings. Also on this stretch is the famous Sawgrass Golf Course, home of the Players' Championship, which will be played here in a couple of weeks from now.

Near Jacksonville we turned inland and skirted the city on the east side and stopped for a very late lunch before crossing the border into Georgia and continuing to our destination for the next two nights in Savannah.

Tonight we ate at a local Bonefish restaurant.

Saturday April 30

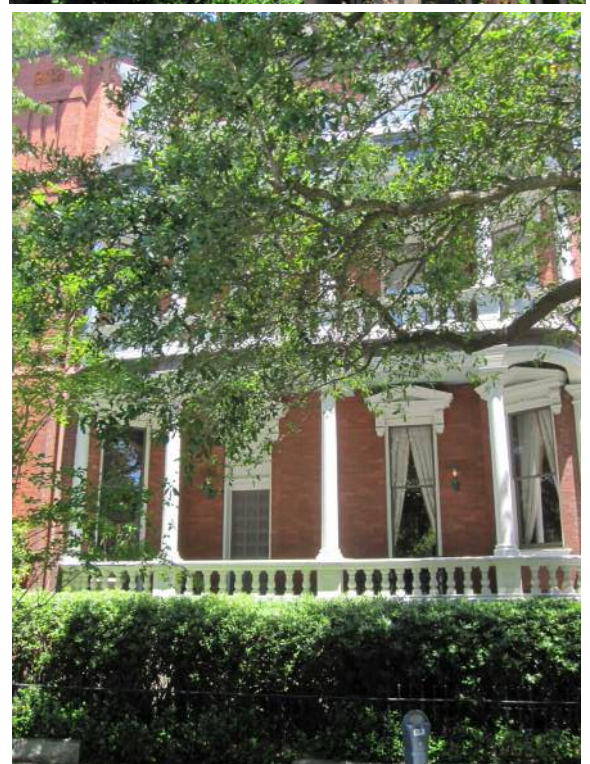
It was a beautiful sunny and mild morning as we drove into Savannah and parked at the Visitor Center. Here we purchased tickets for the hop on/hop off trolley as well as for a one hour cruise on the Savannah River. Before leaving, however, we spent a little time in the History Museum which gave us a little of the history of Savannah.

The colony of Georgia was established as a buffer between Spanish controlled Florida and the British colonies of the Carolinas and north. Savannah is strategically placed about 15 miles from the ocean on a

river navigable by ocean going vessels (it is today the second-largest port on the East Coast) and soon became a center of the cotton industry and a railroad hub.

It played an important part in the Revolutionary War, having been under siege when held by the British but was not lost to the new Union. It obviously played an even more strategic role in the Civil War and eventually surrendered to Union Forces to avoid damage to the city.

Following the Civil War the cotton industry was revitalized some but soon lost to the boll weevil and the city fell into a slump until the ship building industry took hold and it became an important sea port again.





The Beautiful Squares and Homes of Savannah—with the ubiquitous Spanish Moss

The city was laid out from its inception around a series of squares which at one time numbered 24; 22 remain to this day. Each is a tree-lined oasis surrounded by wide streets and boulevards and, with the magnificent homes that surround the parks, the whole city takes on a very upscale European flavor.

The trolley tour took us through or around virtually all the squares and past many historic buildings as we made our way to the waterfront. Here, three and four storey warehouses line the river and each has access on Bay Street, some 45 feet above the water line on the bluffs. The warehouses are now boutique stores and restaurants and the whole waterfront is a very attractive area.

Our one hour river cruise took us past the southern end of the huge container docks area as well as providing another vantage point for the beautiful downtown area. On returning to the shore, we re-boarded our trolley to the Central Market area and strolled slowly back to the parking lot where we had left the car.



Savannah from the river

The weather stayed perfect all day – clear blue skies, low humidity and a temperature just over 80F. All in all a very pleasant day in a grand Southern Town steeped in history and filled with beautiful Live Oak trees and the ubiquitous Spanish Moss which drapes from the tree branches providing a gray contrast to the green leaves of the tree.

We returned to the hotel to begin a search for a restaurant for this evening. The city was very busy with a number of events over this weekend and we were unable to get a reservation at several of the better waterfront restaurants. We finally found a Mediterranean cuisine restaurant a few miles further out of the city which turned out to be very good.

Sunday May 1

We left Savannah and headed northeast to the old town of Beaufort, about 40 miles away. Beaufort had been almost as important as Charleston in its day – cotton and the slave trade being predominant – but is now a rather sleepy town with a very pleasant waterfront. The main street has its share of boutique shops but the newly built park overlooking one of the many rivers in this area is a nice place to stroll and sit. That is exactly what we did: sit with a coffee and pastry on the porch of a small café overlooking the water. It was difficult to tear ourselves away to continue on to Charleston.



Beaufort

We arrived in Charleston before our rooms were ready which “forced” us to sit in the courtyard for a while – and promptly fall asleep. When we did get fully settled we relaxed once more until dinner time. Tonight we went downtown to a recommended restaurant (Magnolia’s) for some “Low Country” cuisine. The food and service were very good and the place was packed even relatively late on a Sunday evening.

Monday May 2

It was a little overcast as we set out today but it promised to be warmer and sunny later. We got the free trolley from the hotel to the Visitor Center where we started a two hour bus tour of the Historic Downtown area. The tour guide/driver was very entertaining and had lots of information about the city, the homes, Charleston’s place in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and the geography and trade of the area.

Most of the bigger homes and mansions had been built in the pre-Civil War era with money from the plantation owners and shipping merchants. The first crops here were rice and indigo but cotton soon became the most important and was, of course, largely responsible for the slave trade and ultimately the War.





Charleston



The approximately ten by six block area contains many dozens of beautiful homes, a large number of which had been visited or lived in by men of importance in the colonial and revolutionary days, including Washington and many signers of the Declaration of Independence.

The city is also known as the Holy City due to the hundreds of churches of all denominations that exist here. Apparently if seven people had the same faith and beliefs they could form a church so many had their beginnings here in Charleston. At the southernmost tip (The Battery) of the peninsula that is the city there is a superb view of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers which surround Charleston and a distant view of Fort Sumter, a man made island fortress built by the Federalists. The fort was the aim of the first shots fired in the Civil War from nearby James Island at the mouth of Charleston Harbor.

In addition to all the history associated with this city, Charleston is now a large sea port and cruise ship terminal and also home to the decommissioned Aircraft Carrier Yorktown. This ship was our destination for the afternoon and we spent two hours or so climbing through the narrow passages and rooms for the crew on our way to the flight deck of this floating museum. In addition to the ship itself and its planes, the carrier also houses many World War II and later memorabilia and interactive exhibits.



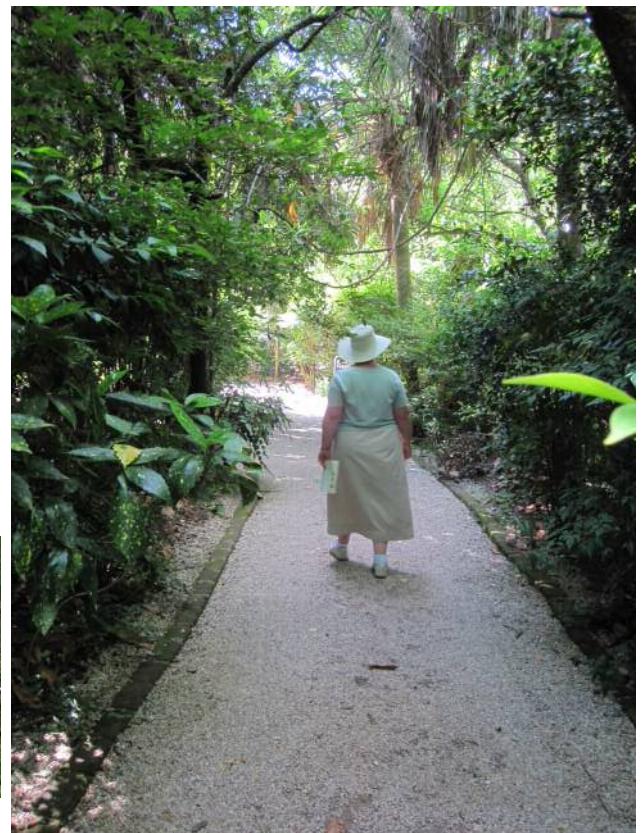
***The Aircraft Carrier
"Yorktown" and one of the
many bridges (right) of this
design seen throughout the
South.***

Tonight we had dinner sitting in a courtyard of an old Ante-Bellum home in downtown Charleston. It was mild, the southern magnolia was just coming out and the food was good. What a pleasant way to spend our final evening in the South.



Tuesday May 3

We checked out of the hotel and drove about 12 miles to the Magnolia Plantation which has been in the same family since the mid-1600s. Clearly the house and gardens have seen a lot of change and virtually the whole of American History (after the Native American period) and, indeed, the plantation itself was a participant in the Wars. However, it was the gardens that we had come to see and we strolled along paths and across bridges and around lakes for about two hours.





Magnolia Plantation



The Camellias, Southern Magnolias, Live Oaks (which never completely shed their leaves so are green all year round) were perhaps most prevalent but there were dozens of other trees and hundreds of flowers of every description. The gardens had originally been laid out in the French formal style but had later been converted (or let go) to what they now called English informality. Whatever the name, the views and the aromas were wonderful and, with Spanish Moss hanging from virtually every tree, the era of “Gone With The Wind” was felt..

After leaving the plantation we drove directly to Augusta, Georgia on non-expressway roads most of the time so we continued to see the flora of the area as well as experiencing a little more of the agriculture and geography along the way.

We arrived in Georgia for the final evening before Bob’s brother leaves for England tomorrow on the evening flight. We feel that we have seen a good cross-section of the South, from the hills of North Carolina and Tennessee to the contrasting sides of New Orleans and the more graceful “Old South” of the Florida panhandle, South Carolina and Georgia. It has been another great trip and we have been very fortunate with the weather – mostly dry, mild and with no tornadoes to contend with.

Wednesday May 4

After checking out of our hotel in Augusta we went downtown to see the town’s “Top attraction”. This is a waterfront park on the Savannah River “filled with shops and cafes”. We imagined something like the Riverwalk in San Antonio although here it seems like it was a nice attempt that just didn’t get going. The brick walkway on the levee is pleasant enough and there are some good views to the huge homes on the South Carolina side of the river. However, the shops and cafes have either not yet made it or have tried and failed because we saw only a Quizno’s in the three block area that we walked. Still, on a cool morning it was pleasant to stroll for a little while before heading for Atlanta.

We took I-20 all the way to Atlanta, stopping just once for gas and a final lunch at Cracker Barrel for Geoffrey. He seems to have been quite taken with these country stores and restaurants.

Once at the Atlanta airport we made sure that Geoffrey got checked in and was headed towards Security before we left and drove directly via I-75 to Chattanooga, our destination for the evening. Once there, we relaxed for a couple of hours and then took a free shuttle trolley to a nearby restaurant where we had a very good meal.

Thursday May 5

We decided not to try to get all the way home in one day (about 400 miles) so we made a reservation at a Courtyard in Lexington and a dinner reservation at the Merrick Inn, a favorite for our meetings with the Wrights when they had lived in Oak Ridge.

The journey was uneventful, although as we had seen late yesterday, there was considerable damage from the tornadoes that had passed through this area earlier in the week. Once in Lexington we soon found the Courtyard and later went for another good meal at the Merrick Inn.

Friday May 6

We had an easy two hour journey home and were back in Mason before noon after a very interesting trip through the south of the USA.