

US Route 50 East from Cincinnati to Ocean Beach, MD



And then down the East Coast

October 2003

Bob and Molly Hillery

We had planned a trip towards the East Coast and then south through the Carolinas into Georgia, before heading northeast back home to Cincinnati.

There were a number of places on the route that we wanted to visit, including Washington, DC, Annapolis as well as the Southern towns of Charleston and Savannah. In addition, we knew that we would be interested in the scenery along the route as well as the early American history to which we would be exposed. None of this disappointed.

In addition, and I don't think really appreciated at the time, US Route 50 was—and still almost is—a “Coast to Coast” Road that now begins in Sacramento, CA and finishes in Ocean Beach, MD. As we undertook this trip, we had not envisioned taking the entire route—but that was to be completed on another road trip several years later.

Hence, this was the final leg of a coast to coast trip begun several years later (!) and one of what turned out to be several very interesting North American Road Trips, usually taken on non-expressway roads and always with a good deal of historical interest.

East Coast, October 2003

Wednesday October 1

We left home at 9:20 and took I-275 to join US Route 50 at Milford. The weather was clear and sunny, although the temperature was in the low 40's and expected to top out in the mid- to high 50's today.

We took US 50 east through Hillsborough to Chillicothe, where we stopped for coffee. We had done this stretch of US 50 a few weeks back on our return from Serpent Mound but from here on we were breaking new ground. The road to Athens was rural farmland and we were beginning to see a few hills as we went further east.

We stopped in Athens for an hour and had a walk round before lunch. The town itself is very attractive (old buildings and brick streets) but the campus of Ohio University is even better. All the buildings were red brick and the whole area was very nicely landscaped and covered with trees. The whole effect was a lot like Miami University in Oxford, but with hills! It seemed a little more compact than Miami, also, and there were lots of students on the streets going between classes.

We had lunch (actually a late breakfast) at the Court Street Diner, a shiny metallic building straight out of the fifties.

We left Athens and continued on Route 50 to cross the Ohio River into Parkersburg, West Virginia. This appeared to be just another industrial town, past its best, so we kept going. Route 50 from Parkersburg is divided highway so we made good time to Clarksburg, about 50 miles into West Virginia. We took a short detour through Salem, but this too was a quaint town well past its best.

The road to Clarksburg climbed through heavily wooded hills and despite some ominous words in our Guide Book about abandoned and derelict coal towns, the whole journey from Athens to Clarksburg was very pleasant.

We checked in at the Holiday Inn just east of Clarksburg a little before 4:30 and relaxed until dinner.

We had dinner at the Outback Steakhouse, about a mile from the hotel. Back in our room by 8:30pm.



Thursday October 2

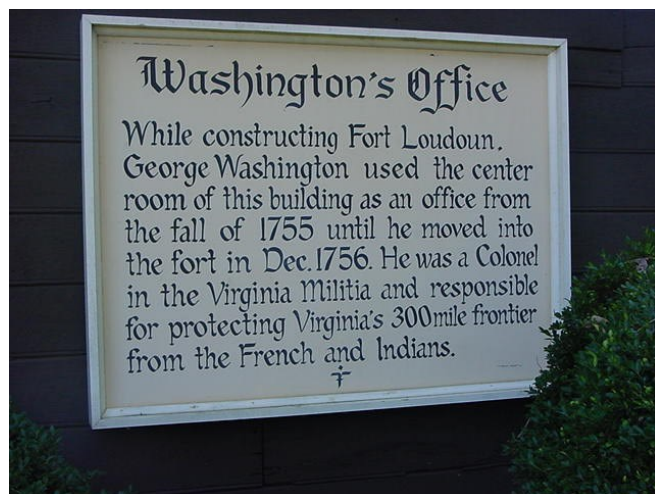


It was in the low 40's as we checked out (8:15) and went (via the town of Bridgeport) to Bob Evans for breakfast about a mile from the hotel. After eating we drove east on Route 50 about 15 miles before we detoured to the town of Grafton, just off the main road. Grafton came into prominence as a major depot for the B&O Railway in the mid 1800's but the center has fallen into decline recently. However, the big railway station is still there and is in the process of a major makeover by the National Park Service. We were able to peer through the windows and see the still

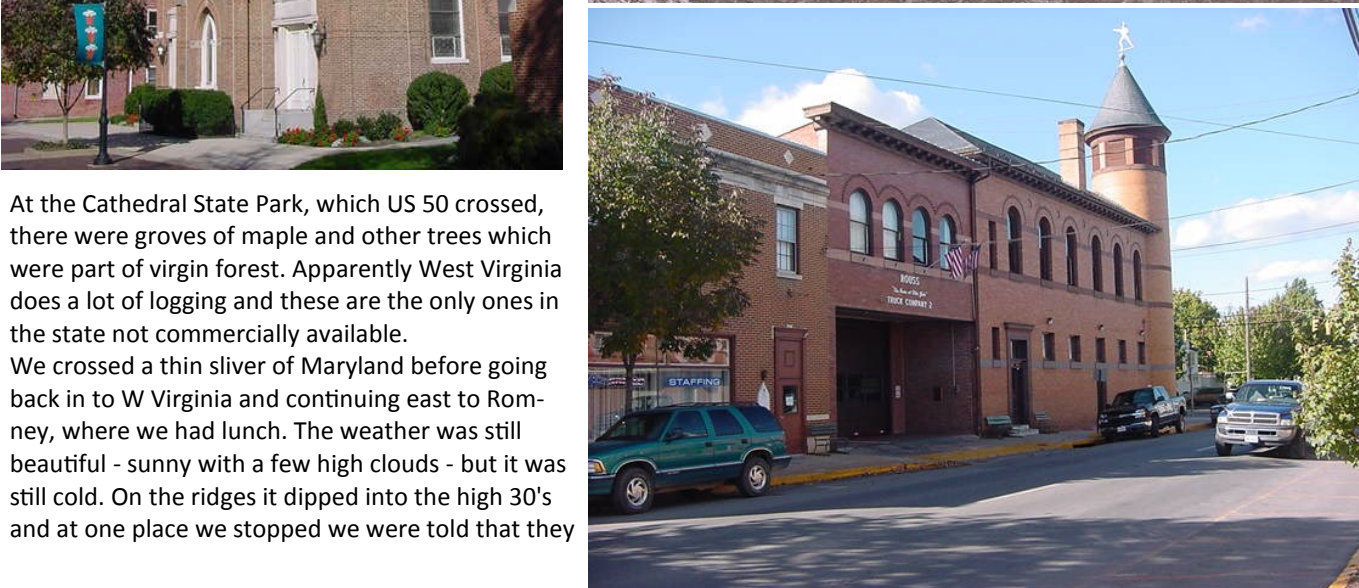
grand main lobby. Also in town is the old hotel and several other fine buildings of the period, but again, most of these have fallen into disrepair. The edges of town appeared quite prosperous, however, with tidy homes and gardens. From Grafton we left US-50 for a while and went north about 15 miles to the village of Arthurdale. This village was founded in the 1930's as a model town for coal mine workers displaced from Morgantown in the Depression. This was a project that Eleanor Roosevelt promoted and she apparently



visited the town on a number of occasions. There are a few of the original houses that are on a "museum tour" but we chose not to take the tour but just viewed some from the outside.



From here we drove east via Kingwood (coffee) almost to the Maryland border before dropping south to re-join Rte 50. The countryside here was quite spectacular - 3000 ft hills, heavily wooded, with some sweeping vistas over the valleys. Where it wasn't forested, the land was farmed, primarily corn and dairy.



At the Cathedral State Park, which US 50 crossed, there were groves of maple and other trees which were part of virgin forest. Apparently West Virginia does a lot of logging and these are the only ones in the state not commercially available. We crossed a thin sliver of Maryland before going back in to W Virginia and continuing east to Romney, where we had lunch. The weather was still beautiful - sunny with a few high clouds - but it was still cold. On the ridges it dipped into the high 30's and at one place we stopped we were told that they

had had a little snow yesterday.

Soon after crossing into Virginia, we stopped at the town of Winchester. The guide book we had suggested it was a nice place to stroll but it turned out to be a lot more than that.



Winchester was a key town in the Civil War and changed hands several times, although it was primarily Unionist. This whole area was, of course, key to the Civil War and we had passed the site where the first Union soldier was killed and Romney (where we had stopped for lunch) had switched sides 50 times during the War.

Winchester has a very informative walking tour leaflet which we obtained from the City Hall and we spent about 1 1/2 hours slowly walking around a 5 by 3 block area that was filled with 1800's architecture. Many of the buildings were "Federalist" which was a unique stone architecture very popular right after the War and which we had seen many times in Pennsylvania and other "New England" towns.

Other buildings here were stately homes built by the very wealthy (Winchester had been a wheat center) and often were in the Greek style with ornate entrances and huge pillars. It really was a very pleasant stop and we topped it off with a late afternoon coffee at one of several coffee bars in the town.

We then just drove the remaining 70 miles to Washington, which was quite slow for the final 30+ miles as we got into city traffic. It was dark when we entered the city and we took a couple of wrong turns before reaching the Courtyard hotel. It was about 8pm by the time we checked in. Thank goodness for the car GPS system, which helped us recover from the wrong turns and one way systems.

We walked about 3 blocks to McCormick and Schmitts seafood restaurant where we had a very good meal before walking back and turning in about 10:30pm.

Friday October 3

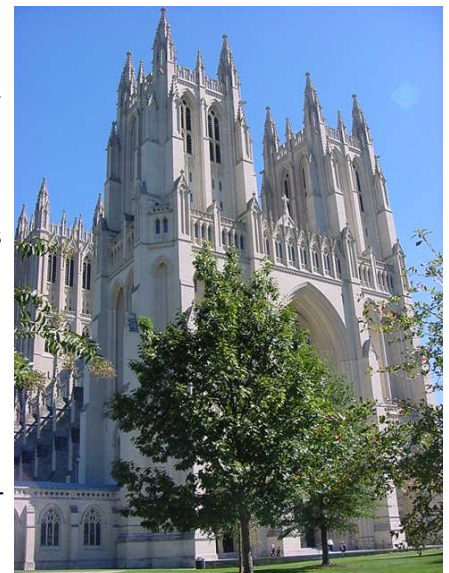
We were up about 8am and had breakfast in the hotel. About 10 we walked around the corner and picked up the Old Town Trolley which covers the whole of the center of Washington in a "hop on-hop off" fashion.

We took it just a couple of stops to the National cathedral where we got off for a two hour visit. The cathedral, built between 1907 and 1990, is in the Gothic style and could fit in any European city. It is a beautiful building on the highest point in the city and sits on a large area of church-related buildings and open area.

Inside, the cathedral is very open and light and has some very nice stained glass windows and some very fine stone pieces, like the altar and the pulpit. We rented audio guides which provided an excellent summary of the highlights of the cathedral.

After viewing the inside, including the view from the top of one of the towers, we walked around the church before re-boarding the trolley.

We went to the next stop which was in the center of Georgetown. Here we had lunch at a nice Italian cafe and walked around a little. The weather was beautiful again - clear and sunny but still cool.





We then took the trolley around the rest of the route which took us down the Mall with a view of all the major monuments. We got back to the hotel about five and relaxed until dinner. For dinner we walked about 5 blocks to Dupont Circle where we had another good Italian meal at La Tomate. Back to the hotel before 10.

Saturday October 4.

There had been some rain during the night and it was still sprinkling a little as we left the hotel after breakfast and started our walk downtown. We walked about 5 blocks south to the north side of the White House and then around the west side to get to the Mall. We had a good view of the south side of the White House, across the lawn, before we were herded away by the police. Someone had left a bag hanging on one of the posts near the WH fence so everyone was kept back while, presumably, the thing was taken away or blown up.

We went to the Washington Monument but decided not to wait the hour or more to take the elevator to the top. Instead we strolled along the Mall toward the Capitol.

There was a National Book Show taking place here with lots of tents and stalls extolling the virtues of reading. There were talks by authors, book signings and sales booths as well as a few spots to buy food and drink. A lot of people were present, including many families with young children.

We walked all the way to the Capitol steps and then headed through the Capitol Arboretum to Union Station. This was pointed out on our trolley tour yesterday as "the most beautiful station in the world" and it certainly is a very striking building on the outside.

It is no less impressive on the inside. The main lobby has a very high semicircular dome over a marble tiled floor and there are several statues adorning the roof line. Although there are now only a relatively few trains per day here the station is still bustling as a result of the several



nice restaurants, food court and shops within the covered area. They really have done a good job of utilizing some very choice real estate which so easily could have been run down and become an eyesore.



We had lunch here and did a little shopping before getting the subway back to DuPont Circle and then the three block walk back to the hotel. We felt like we had done a marathon after our day of walking but I calculated that we actually covered just less than four miles.

For dinner we walked about 3 blocks south to Olives, another Italian restaurant. The restaurant itself was fully booked for the evening but we were able to get a small table in the bar area. It turned out to be an EXCELLENT meal - I had Dover sole with white asparagus - and I topped it off with a \$22 grappa (which tasted just like all the \$5 grappas!) An excellent conclusion to our visit to Washington.

Sunday October 5



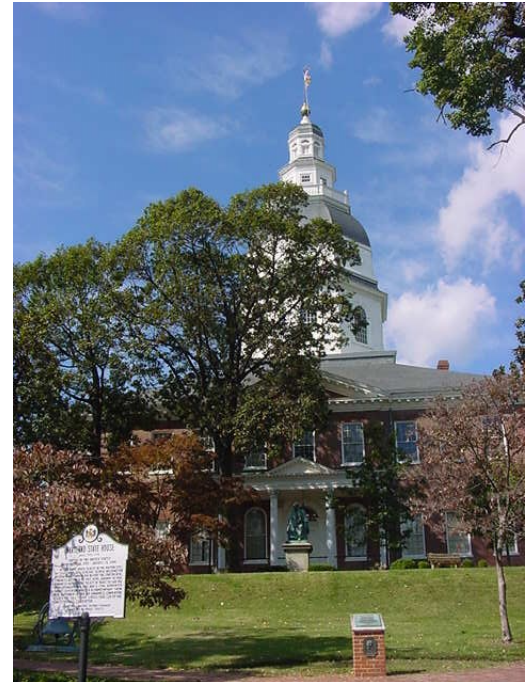
We checked out of the hotel about 10am and drove the 20 or so miles to Annapolis. We stopped here for about two hours and spent the time strolling around this very nice town. We got a leaflet from the visitors' center which de-



scribed a walk around the town center and gave a brief

summary of the buildings identified - much like the one we took in Winchester.

Like Winchester, Annapolis has lots of pre- and post- Revolutionary buildings and some which pre-date the Revolution by quite some time. The Maryland Capitol is the central icon in town (it was the US capital for a while) but



there are many other brick and wooden buildings that are very attractive. The waterfront near the Naval Academy is also very attractive.



After Annapolis we continued on US-50 across the Bay Bridge to the Maryland eastern Shore. We took one short detour off Route 50 to St Michaels, which is an old fishing and shipbuilding town on the Chesapeake Bay. We had lunch here and took a brief stroll around town. The weather today was a little milder (mid-60's) and very sunny with a few high white clouds. There was a stiff breeze much of the time so it still felt quite cool.

After lunch we continued on to Ocean City where we checked into a very nice room (suite) in the Holiday Inn. We had a tremendous view over the sand and ocean.

For dinner we drove about 3 miles to the other Holiday Inn in town where we ate at Reflections. This was a very good meal and we both had the local dish- Maryland crab cakes.

Monday October 6

We had breakfast at a diner just next door to the Holiday Inn and then walked a little on the boardwalk before checking out and leaving Ocean City about 11am.



We took a picture of the "Sacramento" sign at the eastern end of US 50 and then headed west about 8 miles on this road to pick up Rte 113 south and then US-13 south. The countryside here (and for the whole day) was dead flat and not particularly exciting. We took about a 20 mile detour to visit Onancock, a little harbor town on the Chesapeake Bay. We had coffee and a donut here before continuing south on US-13 to the Bay Bridge-Tunnel. This is a twenty mile combination of two tunnels and bridges and causeways to connect the eastern shore of Virginia to its mainland. Once across the Bay we were in Virginia Beach where we just drove through the town and headed further south, now on US 17. We continued straight through via Elizabeth City to Nags Head where we checked in at a Comfort Inn about 6:30pm. We were surprised to find hotel prices still pushing and exceeding \$100 at this time of the season.

We went about 2 miles to JK's restaurant where we had a very good meal. Back to the hotel by 9pm. Weather today was a good deal warmer than we have experienced for a while with sunny skies and a temperature reaching 75F by mid- afternoon. As we drove into Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head on the beach road we saw lots of evidence of Hurricane Isabel which came through here just 2 1/2 weeks ago. There were houses that had been blown off their foundations and many had collapsed walls, roofs or whole buildings. Many more had police tape around them suggesting that they were unsafe for habitation. The yards and streets were littered with debris and great piles of sand. Parts of the road were impassable. Two blocks west, however, and you would never have known there had been a storm.

Tuesday October 7

We had continental breakfast in the hotel and sat and watched the ocean for a little while before checking out and going to the Wright Brothers' National Historic Site, which was only 1/2 mile from the hotel.



We listened to a park ranger talk on the events leading up to the first flight and how the Wright brothers found this spot for their trials (three years work) and eventual success. We then walked to the spot where the first four flights took off and saw the markers identifying the spots where they landed, from 120 feet to 859 feet in length. There is a large memorial to the brothers on top of the big sand dune where they tried some of their glider attempts, but we just drove round it and didn't take the walk to the top.

The weather was fine and sunny and the temperature was already in the mid-70's - and it was noticeably more humid that we had experienced to date on this trip.



We went about 10 miles south of Nags Head on the Hatteras Island (or is it Pea Island at this point?) to see a lighthouse on the sound and then over Oregon Inlet on a long bridge. We stopped for a few minutes to look over the dunes and then turned back to Nags Head, Manteo, Roanoke Island and the mainland.

Isabel had formed a new inlet on Hatteras Island so there was no way to go down the Outer Banks so we were forced inland.

We took US 17 south to Washington through very isolated and sparsely populated areas. Here too there were lots of signs of Isabel with many trees down, some roof damage to homes but very few with what appeared to be serious damage. We were west of the sound here so it could have been expected to be a little more sheltered so there was still a lot of damage.

We stopped at a gas station to pick up drinks and we snacked on these and trail mix since there weren't any places to eat.

We did stop in Washington for about 30 minutes to stretch our legs and learn a little about this town which had been a major port (it's well up an estuary) in the 1800's but fell into decline after the Civil War. It still has a lot of historic buildings and there is a marked walking tour (with leaflet) which we didn't have time (or the energy?) to complete.

We then drove directly to Morehead City and Atlantic Beach where we found a Best Western right on the ocean. By now (6pm) it was cloudy and we had come through a little shower on our way south.

Went for dinner at the Watermark (recommended by the hotel) which turned out to be a small place in a strip mall. They had a good menu, however, and the food was good, although my fish was undercooked. A little pricey, even with one meal "covered".

Wednesday October 8

There had been rain overnight and it was threatening as we drove a couple of miles to a local diner for breakfast. After check-out we drove along the outer banks to rejoin the mainland and head south towards Wilmington. The weather turned worse

and we had some significant showers before and after crossing the North-South Carolina border. We had coffee and a doughnut in Wilmington (which looked an interesting and historical town and we would have stopped for longer had the weather been better) and then drove on through Myrtle Beach in SC. At one point in Georgetown SC we were diverted because of flooded roads and we went through some torrential rains. The temperature was in the upper 70's however. We did stop at Pawley's Island to buy a hammock (we got our last one there 21 years ago) and again at a roadside stand just north of Charleston to buy sweet grass baskets (again a repeat of 21 years ago). We checked into the Courtyard in North Charleston at 6pm and went about 5 miles away to the Noisy Oyster restaurant for dinner. My meal was good; Molly's was so-so. Back to the hotel by 9:30pm.

Thursday October 9

It was overcast and threatening rain as we left the hotel and drove downtown today. We parked at the visitor center and



checked the times of the bus/boat tours of Charleston. It turned out that there were tours every half hour so we first had breakfast at a local coffee shop before catching the 11 am bus.

The driver was very well informed on Charleston and we spent a very interesting 1 1/2 hours slowly driving through the narrow streets of the city. He told us about the history of the city in terms of its architecture and about the pre-revolutionary and the ante-bellum periods. Of most

significance to this city, however, was the Civil War period and the part that it and particularly Fort Sumter played in that war. It was here that the war started with shots fired by the Confederates on the Union held Fort Sumter shortly after SC seceded from the Union, just a month after Republican Abraham Lincoln was elected.

The issue was that the Republicans had run on the ticket of NOT allowing NEW states to vote on whether or not they would allow slavery. The concern in the south was that this might spread to not allowing slavery to continue in the OLD states which

would have been devastating to their economy which depended on lots of African labor for the rice and other plantations.

Interesting to us were several quotes of Lincoln's in which he did not disavow slavery but rather claimed that his cause was simply to save the Union. In fact, he held some quite strong opinions about the blacks and suggested that whites were indeed superior. Not the Abraham Lincoln that we thought we knew! Recall, we are in the South!

After lunch, we continued our tour by boat with the half hour trip across the estuary to Fort Sumter. The Fort was quite badly damaged in the early days of the war during the two year siege of it and Charleston. However, the two lower storeys are reasonably intact and preserved and it is interesting to visit. The National Park Service operates it and they gave a very informative talk in the fort. Then we had about an hour to walk around before taking the boat back to



downtown. By now the weather was beautiful with very few clouds and bright sunshine. There was a strong breeze on the island and on the water which felt good compared to the heat and humidity in the town.

We walked back to the car to admire some of the fine homes and churches and just to take in the atmosphere of this charming and very historic town. It was mentioned several times that before the Civil War it was the fourth



largest city in America and its most important port but all that was changing in the years before the war and it was completely changed by the war. Recently, however, the port has grown (now the second largest on the east coast) and certainly the city has done a lot to preserve its heritage via its very fine buildings,. We went downtown for dinner at the Boatyard and had an excellent meal. We both had the crab cake and lobster tail dinner with blue cheese coleslaw and vegetable (asparagus) and everything was delicious. Back home before 10pm.

Friday October 10

We checked out of the hotel about 9:30 and drove downtown for breakfast at the same coffee shop that we had eaten at yesterday. We then walked to the market which is held everyday under cover, much like the market place in New Orleans. We spent about an hour shopping and then walked back to the car, stopping for a coffee on the way. The weather was overcast but quite bright and warm. We left Charleston and drove south to Beaufort about 40 miles from Savannah before stopping for a light lunch and a walk around the town and the riverside park area. Then on to Savannah where we checked into the Courtyard on Abercorn St about 5:30pm. We drove about 3 miles to dinner at the Saltwater Grille where we had a very good seafood meal right on the waterfront. (Not sure which river).



Saturday October 11

We drove downtown and had breakfast at a coffee shop. We then took the 90 minute trolley tour of the Historic District, which took us through the many squares of the town The



squares, with the beautiful old trees and Spanish moss hanging from each, are the highlight of this town. In addition, there are many fine old buildings





from the Ante-Bellum period.

After the tour we had lunch on the riverfront in one of the several cafes in the old warehouses that have been converted into useful property. We then took a one hour boat ride on the river which took us through the port area - Savannah also claimed to be the second largest port on the East Coast.

The weather stayed dry all day although it looked like it could rain at any time. We did have some bright periods, however. After the boat tour we walked through the City Market (nowhere near as good as the one in Charleston), had a cup of coffee and then drove back to the hotel.

We went to Mary's Restaurant, about 2 miles from the hotel, and had another good lobster tail dinner.

Sunday October 12



We checked out of the hotel soon after 8:30 and drove downtown for breakfast (Starbucks). We then drove northwest, at first on I-95 and then on parallel routes off the expressway as far as Columbia, the South Carolina capital. We stopped near the Capitol and walked around the state buildings for a while. While we were there hundreds of bikers drove into the area and began assembling for a rally - we think they were arguing NOT to wear crash helmets.

We had lunch in Columbia (Subway) and then drove in a northwesterly direction to a tiny town called Ninety Six. Ninety Six was a crossroads on several old Indian trails and became a key trading spot in Colonial times between the British and the Cherokees. As a result, a fort was built here and it played a role in the Revolutionary War and was the site of the South's first casualty in this war. By this time of day, the weather had really improved from the early morning clouds and it was a very sunny 77F by late afternoon.

After a very pleasant stop we drove on to Anderson SC where we checked into a Days Inn about 6:15pm. We had dinner at Carson's steakhouse a few miles from the hotel. Quite good food, peanuts on the floor, ambiance and no booze! Anderson County is dry on Sundays.

Monday October 13

Had continental breakfast in the hotel and checked out soon after 9. We drove first to Clemson where we drove around the very nice University Campus and then continued on into the hills. The drive was very attractive, climbing up through heavy forests where the leaves were turning. We crossed the Eastern Continental Divide (3711 feet) near Highlands and then continued on into the town.

This turned out to be a very pleasant oasis in the sparsely populated area and the small town was very attractive. We first found a nice coffee shop Buck's (where "friends don't let their friends drink Starbucks") where we had coffee and cookies and then we strolled around town.

There were many very good quality men's and women's shops, Christmas shops (bought stocking stuffers) and other boutiques. There was also a very attractive inn and several good looking restaurants. All in all a very unexpected and pleasant find where we ended up spending the best part of two hours. The weather was sunny and mild so that made it all the more pleasant.

Also in Highlands we visited the National Forest center where we picked up a map showing a scenic drive from here to Cherokee, so we decided to follow it. This, too, provided a



very pleasant and unexpected addition to our vacation as we drove up and down several ranges past beautiful trees, large waterfalls and broad panoramas over the mountains. One part of the route took us past a whitewater river where we watched a few rafters and kayakers and had a coffee sitting by the rapids. We also saw the Smokey Mountains Railroad train at a couple of locations.

The clouds thickened a little towards the end of the afternoon but it stayed dry and warm until we checked into the Fairfield Inn at Cherokee. This was just opposite a huge Harrah's casino,

owned by the Indians. The whole town has built up tremendously since we were last here.

We had dinner at the restaurant at the Holiday Inn in town. This turned out to be a fairly good meal (Cherokee isn't for fine dining) but - for the second night - no alcohol. We don't know whether this was another county ordinance or if it was simply a Reservation law. Anyway, we survived!

Tuesday October 14

Had continental breakfast in hotel and checked out about 9:30. We drove into the Smokey Mountains national Park and over the top to Gatlinburg. The weather was cloudy when we set off and it became very foggy at the top so we couldn't see very far. However, the trees were still very colorful and it was a pleasant drive.

We drove straight through Gatlinburg (wall to wall people) and headed east parallel to the Park. This was a scenic route and again the trees were about at their peak for colors.

We stopped in a small town for lunch at a local diner - good food, very "local" ambiance) and then proceeded across sev-



eral ridges, passing from Tennessee to Virginia and then into Kentucky at Cumberland Gap. The weather got steadily worse and we went through some tremendous rainstorms before it cleared somewhat as we headed north on US-25. We checked into the Fairfield Inn at Corbin soon after 5pm and relaxed until dinner time. Tonight it was a good Mexican restaurant - but once again we found a dry county. Three in a row!!

Wednesday October 15

It was a beautiful morning – sunny but cool – as we had breakfast in the hotel and checked out. We drove west to Somerset through rolling farmland and some quite deep gorges to river crossings. It was beautiful countryside and the trees were very colorful; apparently they hadn't lost everything in the storms of the previous day. Somerset didn't have anything to cause us to stop so we drove on in a northerly direction, again through some spectacular farmland scenery. We stopped in Danville (founded by a guy called Daniel) which turned out to be an interesting interlude. Danville had been the original capital of Kentucky when it broke off from Virginia to gain its own statehood. There was a commemorative garden with plaques depicting all governors of the state from then to date. There was no indication as to when the capital was moved to Frankfort. Also in Danville was a series of log buildings (jail, courthouse, post office, etc) – all replicas except the post office) typical of early 1800's life. One contained a copy of Kentucky's constitution. The town also boasts a number of "firsts", including the first law school in the west. After lunch at the local café in Danville we drove on to Frankfort and spent an hour taking a self-guided tour of the

Capitol, built in 1907. It is a spectacular building inside (fairly typical



for capitols outside) with two grand staircases and lots of marble. The building itself is set in some beautiful grounds with a long, well-landscaped "mall" on the north side.

We then drove home, as far as we could on US routes and then via I-71 and I-75 through Cincinnati to home, arriving about 5:30pm.

Another good trip with some beautiful scenery and lots of US history.

Driving Information

Cincinnati to:	Mile	Cum	X	Day	Stopover	Actual	Cum Ac-
Parkersburg WV	186	186	X		1 Clarksburg WV	274	274
Clarksburg	67	253	X		2 Washington	248	522
Winchester VA	135	388	X		3 Washington	0	522
Washington DC	50	438	X		4 Washington	0	522
Baltimore MD	70	508	X		5 Ocean City MD	175	697
Ocean City	113	621	X		6 Nags Head NC	279	976
Virginia Beach VA	134	755	X		7 Atlantic Beach	249	1225
Nags Head NC	126	881	X		8 Charleston SC	282	1507
Moorhead City	140	1021	X		9 Charleston SC	37	1544
Wilmington	92	1113	X		10 Savannah GA	140	1684
Charleston SC	157	1270	X		11 Savannah GA	14	1698
Savannah GA	120	1390	X		12 Anderson SC	300	1998
Columbia SC	155	1545	X		13 Cherokee NC	153	2151
Greenville	105	1650	X		14 Corbin KY	242	2393
Ashville NC	60	1710	X		Cincinnati	242	2635
Knoxville TN	97	1807	X				
Cincinnati OH	270	2077	X				
	207					2635	
					Hours in car	69.25	
					Ave MPH	38.05054	
					Fuel Consump-	24.2 MPG	