

Are you ready to join Jim and me on a trip to Hawks Nest in West Virginia?
Hawks Nest

It is daylight and almost 6AM on March 23, 2006 as the little red Cavalier eases out of our driveway, beginning yet another of our famous adventures. This time we are heading for a train modelers' convention at Hawks Nest Lodge near Ansted, West Virginia. You have traveled many of the miles of this trip with us in my previous stories so I will not repeat much of the basic trip today.

Our trip westward leads us to our usual "Must Stop" place of Moss Run, Virginia, and we spend some time just inhaling the peace and beauty of this spot. The cacti are in their initial stages of growth and not a wild flower is visible but the rocks and trees make up for any lack of color.



OF COURSE Jim gets several good pictures of trains passing by.

Our destination for tonight is the Super 8 Motel at Lewisburg, Virginia, and we travel through wonderful back roads to get there. Spring is barely in the woods but ferns gingerly poke their fronds through the dry brown leaves. Daffodils tell the story of houses that are no longer there.



After supper at our favorite Bob Evans Restaurant, we settle in for the night with the Weather Channel warning us of wet slushy snow tomorrow. Oh, joy!

Friday morning dawns about forty degrees and the sun is peaking between the clouds. Jim decides to take the back roads instead of the Interstate so we are immersed in breathtaking scenery, eventually browsing roads along the New River Gorge.

At last we arrive at Ansted, West Virginia. Hawks Nest Lodge is part of Hawks Nest State Park and is owned by the state of West Virginia. This place is very comfortable and our room has a spectacular view of the gorge “miles” beneath us.



A private balcony just outside our door is the perfect place to snap pictures as heavily loaded grain and coal trains snake their way eastward along the river. That river is dark green today.

We register for the convention, then meet a group of Jim’s train buddies. I find a gift shop and don’t you just know they have another Appalachian cook book...on sale yet! And they have a new selection of brass ornaments for my collection. Hooray for Master Card!

This lodge boasts a walk-trail to their scenic overlook. Sure I want to go! It is no problem walking down the one hundred steps to the outcropping of rocks (with a very sturdy fence around the edge) and we are treated to an incredible view of the river below us. Water rushing over the huge dam a mile away echoes off the mountains.



(A bit about that dam.... In 1930 Union Carbide formed the New-Kanawha Power Company and built the 80 foot high, 836 foot long dam and a 3.2 mile tunnel which diverts water from the New River through Gauley Mountain to a power production facility. Eight hundred men, earning thirty five cents an hour, drilled the tunnel through solid silica rock and at least 476 men died of silicosis, a lung disease caused by unsafe working conditions. It created quite a lawsuit when families took the company to court.) Don't you just know, Jim is a happy camper with his camera just a-clickin' away? Then I peer over the fence and spot two of the rocks barely balanced on each other. OK-----time to leave! Those rocks may have been balanced that way for eons but this chicken thinks of things like earth tremors and I can't swim. Remember the one hundred steps down? The way back to the lodge is those same one hundred steps-----up.

Dinner is very pleasant as we sit at a table beside tall windows facing the gorge. Hawks spiral on thermals over the river and the world is at peace. Night begins to close in as glints of light play games across the water. Trains passing by disappear into the mist of darkness.

The meeting room is filled with train buffs, with some guys standing along the walls. Mike Burgett from Michigan gives a presentation on railroad signals and the reasons why they are placed in specific positions. I never really thought much about that aspect of railroads before but it is an interesting topic and I certainly will be paying closer attention to signals from now on. Several of the club members have set up real locomotive whistles (removed from locomotives from years past) that are being blown by compressed air at the marina along the river and each hour they set off whistles which sound like a train is coming right into the meeting room. Their last whistle is scheduled for 3AM. We spend the next hour looking at exhibits and displays as Jim renews friendships with people from all over the country.

Jim wakes me on Saturday morning with the announcement, “It’s white out there!” Such a gorgeous Christmas card world with snow hanging from every tree branch.



The white picket fence beneath our balcony is now a wall of pointy snow poofs. By the way, we did not hear the 3AM whistle. Either we did not hear it or the “whistle blowers” got into a party mode and forgot the scheduled event.

After the “Bird Watchers’ Special” breakfast, Jim and I set out to investigate more back roads. An Ansted policeman gives Jim directions to the road to the Hawks Nest marina and the little red Cavalier has its work cut out for it. The road starts out paved



but steadily deteriorates into a one-lane cow path of chuckholes, big water puddles, and rocks as we grind our way to the bottom of the canyon, past waterfalls and marvelous rock formations.



The farther down the mountain we go, the less snow is on the ground. At last the New River is before us!

We park for a while along the river and drink in the view.





My attempt to describe the beauty and majesty of it falls far short of reality. When you see the slogan “Wild and Wonderful West Virginia”, you better **believe it!** Drizzle tap dances across the car roof and that dark green river is peppered with white splashes. You can see the snow above us but it never reaches the ground here at the river bank. A white former school bus arrives and four men scour the area with a metal detector. I would guess their trip down the cow path was no picnic. A graceful white swan “pays us no mind” as he dives for his breakfast --- a striking contrast against the green of the water.

The scanner crackles its promise of an oncoming train and Jim reaches for his camera. The tracks are on the opposite side of the river but they cross a bridge about a quarter of a mile to our left. Speed is not an option as westbound number Q303 inches its way across the long metal structure. A pair of ducks paddle downstream and aren’t the least bit bothered by the rain or the train.

Twenty minutes later a hopper train follows Q303 across the bridge, taking its empty cars back to the coal fields for refills. Even more quackers form a flotilla and bob like corks toward the bridge. At one point they surround the swan but do not get any reaction from him. Snowflakes drift over the river and splat on our windshield, then rain takes over the show again.

Our buddies in the white converted school bus head back up the mountain and I surely would not care to be a passenger in that vehicle. A third train passes westward with still more empty hoppers. Two more empty hopper trains and one with empty grain cars pass us in quick

succession. The white swan is still floating lazily under the long bridge while two fishermen putt-putt by in a pontoon boat. Remember the flotilla of ducks? They are still making waves in the water.

Just as the pontoon boat comes to shore and the sun breaks through the clouds, we start back up the mountain. I watch for the old white bus but don't see it at the bottom of drop-offs so they must have made it to higher ground.. When we came down this "hill" I was riding on the mountain side of the road but now I am on the other side and there is a whole lot of nothing between me and that deep canyon. My view is STRAIGHT DOWN! Yikes!



Steam is rising from the rocky road ahead of us as the sun tries to warm our world. This place will be awash with pink beauty when all the mountain laurels open. Along the way someone has decorated a small evergreen tree with colorful plastic Easter eggs and bright beads. Hmm.....gives me an idea for our living room at home..... We claw our way up to the canyon rim and see snow-covered ground with daffodils poking their way free of their winter blanket.

Whew! Little red Cavalier made it safely back to the top. I could kiss its little fender.



Biscuit World serves us a great steak biscuit, then we drive through a snowstorm to Hawks Nest Overlook (This one is about a mile from the lodge.) Across the street is the now-closed-for-winter gift shop and park.



The walkway to the observation area looks like it is heading off the map:



The snow squall has passed and we stand in warm sunshine as another trainload of coal heads eastward. Jim is really enjoying the day.



The view is spectacular!



The conventioners are back at the bottom of the gorge, blowing those steam whistles again and the sound echoes up and down the chasm. Several tourists at the overlook appear to be confused and look expectantly for another train but none is in sight. We do not clarify the situation for them; we just let 'em wonder.

After another yummy dinner at the restaurant, we attend several interesting presentations. Alright!!!! Jim has won one of the door prizes.

Morning, Sunday March 26, and it is snowing again.



We pack our belongings, say our good byes and head for Lynchburg in another Christmas card world.



A few miles from the lodge we must make the decision to take the more-traveled road to the Interstate or stay on Route 60 for the more scenic route. The roads are clear so we choose Route 60. Several miles later that decision is deemed to be a bad one and we cruise over Big Sewell Mountain (origin of General Robert E. Lee's famous horse, Traveller) at about 20 miles an hour.



At the bottom of the mountain the roads improve greatly and we happily make our trip home.

Our 501-mile trip is over and 1131 Heath Avenue is waiting for us. Life is good!

