

SPRINGWOOD 2003

Consciousness slowly surfaces in the still-darkened bedroom on a chilly April morning in Lynchburg. Do we really want to leave our warm bed? Ah, but Springwood beckons so visions of another couple of hours of sleep fade into the excitement of pre-dawn preparations for the day ahead.

A couple of bologna sandwiches, some red grapes, an assortment of fresh veggies, and a few sodas are tucked into the bright red cooler and we are happily on our way, mugs of steaming coffee in hand, just as the first hint of daylight comes our way.

When dawn overtakes the darkness we are awed by drifts of magenta flowering redbud trees alongside pristine snow white dogwoods which sparkle among the rich dark pines and spring green deciduous trees as the mist shrouded Blue Ridge Mountains come closer into view. A quick stop in Roanoke yields a full tank of gas and refilled coffee mugs. Now we are ready for Springwood.

The winding highway north of Roanoke leads us through the fresh rain-washed countryside dotted with the “stuff” of spring and pastures brimming with cattle and new-born calves, contentedly munching their breakfast. A turn off the main road reveals a curving not-quite-gravel washboard road that takes us the last three and a half miles to our destination where the James River makes a horseshoe bend around a high bluff. At last we are here as the sun pops over the horizon. We park our car along the path and scramble up steps Nature provides.

Ah, the peace of this place. From our vantage point on a rocky outcrop more than a hundred feet above the rain-swollen James River, we assume mental ownership of the panoramic lush valley below us.



Waves of cattle spread across the pastures as far as the eye can see. In the distance is a windmill and its white blades reflect the sunlight in the early morning chilled breeze. Beside us pines and more redbuds reach for the sky as their trunks find escape between the rocks. Yellow and white wildflowers are sprinkled around us. One lone purple wood violet dares to face the competition of budding mayflowers and sprouting wild geraniums. Snaking along the valley floor, the CSX Railroad track crosses a bridge across the river and disappears into a tunnel directly below where we sit. This valley is a huge green bowl, ringed on all sides by Appalachian Mountains.



Soon two other railfans arrive and set up their tripods on the wind-swept perch. Jim and the two men talk about railroads, cameras, politics, and other things as we wait for trains to pass by and create photo opportunities.

I retreat to the sun-warmed car and keep my hands busy with a Winnie the Pooh plastic canvas project. It's my job to monitor the scanner and listen for approaching trains.

At one point I spot Jim, sprawled on the cold wet ground, taking a close-up picture of a bright yellow wildflower I had admired.



What a jewel my husband is! God has richly blessed me!

As we wait for the train, three long white campers are parked on a knoll across the valley while several hawks gracefully soar overhead. Already the trees in the pastures have enough leaves to create pools of shade at their feet. An unseen jet rumbles its presence above us, then is gone, leaving behind only the gentle whoosh of the wind.

Suddenly the scanner comes to life. A train is sixteen miles away and heading toward us. Anticipation fills the air as lens caps are removed. Even the cattle resting under the trees seem to sense the excitement and form a queue toward another part of the pasture. Soon the wind carries the thunder of power confirming the scanner's report.

Yippee! Here it comes! Cameras click. Mission accomplished. The railfans are happy.

But wait....the scanner announces another train, soon to come our way from the opposite direction. The guys head for their vehicles to reload film and find the best position on the other side of the tunnel to photograph the next train. This view is not nearly so grand but is pretty none the less with plenty of green trees and redbud "lace" for a backdrop. One long mountain rises above the trees and encircles our view.

Yippee! Here it comes! Again the film whirrs. I stand on the lane high above the tunnel and feel the vibrations as the train passes beneath me.

The smiling railfans shake hands and go their separate ways after a day filled with peace and beauty. Let's go home and plan for our next trip to Springwood, Virginia.