

## 2 – NEW HAMPSHIRE AND MAINE

Tuesday, 6 October

Colm and I woke early today; it was another cool but bright morning. We joined Rita and Bud in the kitchen and had our usual hearty breakfast. Afterwards, Bud drove us up the road to a quiet housing estate so that I could try driving his car. I had never driven on the right-hand side of the road in a car with automatic transmission, and with the steering wheel on the left. It felt very strange sitting in the unfamiliar vehicle and I found the gear lever a little awkward at first. However, I managed to drive around the narrow roads successfully a few times, stop, start, and reverse. Once I had mastered this, the 'lesson' concluded after just a few minutes. Bud did not offer Colm the chance of driving the car; it later transpired that he was unaware that Colm was my 'named' second driver.

We returned to the house, took some photos, then set off once again in Bud's car. As we had plenty of time to spare, he drove us to the bridge in nearby Lexington where the first shot of the War of Independence had been fired in 1775. What we saw was a reconstructed wooden bridge set in a pretty spot, through which busloads of tourists were being escorted. We then drove through Concord village, turned at the Catholic church and stopped at a little graveyard where Rita's mother had been buried. After she had inspected the flowers, we were driven to the Herz office in Burlington.

Following a short delay, a rather impersonal fellow dealt with me. Taking Bud's whispered advice, I declined additional insurance, paid \$672 plus tax, and was given a key. A few minutes later we walked outside to the car – not a two-door Ford Escort with a hatchback, which I had originally requested, but a four-door Nissan Altima saloon, which was white in colour and looked very new. We put our baggage into the 'trunk' and began to familiarize ourselves with the controls. Bud helped us and told us to pay no attention to the fact that Colm was not allowed to drive simply because he did not have a credit card.

The plan now was to follow Bud to the Interstate 93 highway here in Massachusetts. I sat down in the driver's seat feeling very apprehensive and, when I had adjusted the position of the seat and the mirrors, inched the car out cautiously. Bud came over to see what was causing the delay. At last we got going and I followed his car along a couple of minor roads. We then drove on to the highway, mingling with the traffic and, a short distance farther on, Bud waved to us and turned off to the right. Once we had waved to them both, we were on our own. Much more at ease by now, I let out a whoop of excitement and settled back to savour the novel experience of driving an American automatic car on the right-hand side of an American dual carriageway. It was effortless; the car did all the work and soon I felt completely at ease as I could not accidentally wander over to the wrong side of the road.

The highway was an excellent one: flat, beautifully surfaced, and well signposted; for much of the journey it passed through some pleasant scenery. At around lunchtime, when we began to feel hungry, we pulled into a McDonald's

restaurant and ordered a meal of hamburgers, slices of pumpkin pie, and water. The pumpkin pie was quite tasty.

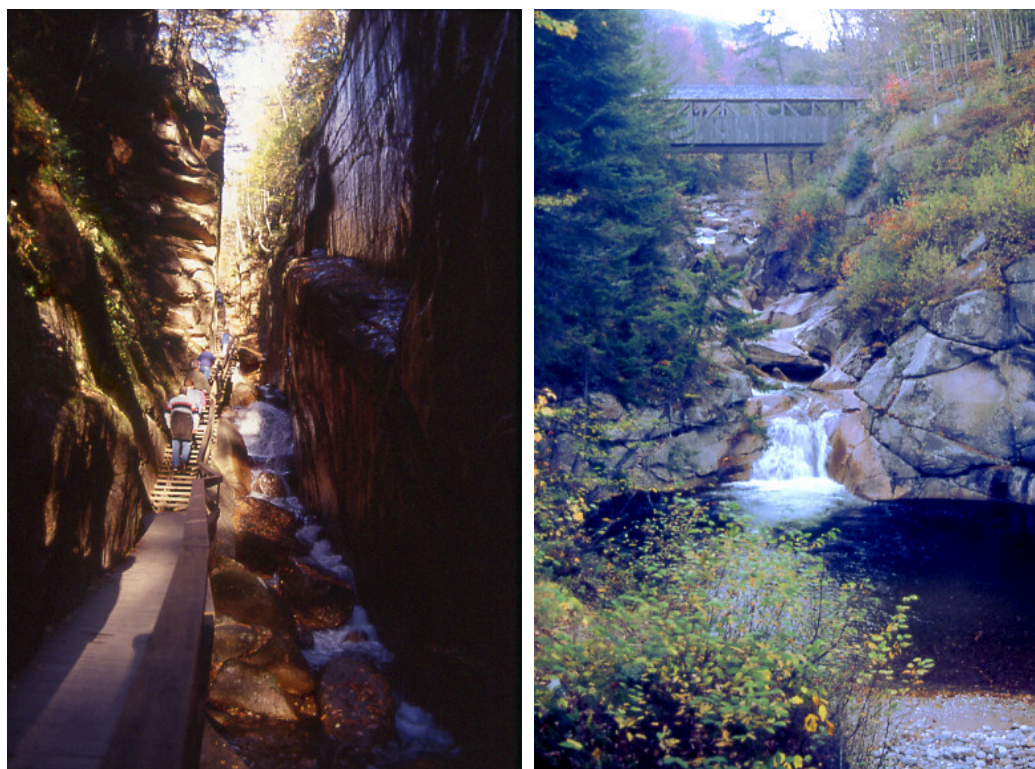


Afterwards we tried to telephone a motel from one of the phones outside but, thanks to confusion over which prefixes to dial or omit, I lost a dollar and did not succeed in getting through. The telephone operator and the girls in McDonald's were not much help. We therefore abandoned the effort and set off once again.

Thanks to the excellence of the road and the good speed that we were making, we began to reach our destination, the White Mountains, sooner than expected. We turned off the I-93 on to Route 3, then went in search of a motel near Thornton. The road, also perfectly surfaced and virtually traffic-free, turned out to be beautiful, for the scenery was pleasant and the houses nearby looked interesting. At one spot we could see a wooden covered bridge in the distance. Colm looked out for the motel that we had hoped to stay in, but could not find it. We stopped at a small country store in order to ask about its whereabouts and were given the telephone number of another motel named Six B. I rang the number and a man told me that he had a vacant room for \$50, which we decided to take. He then gave us directions for travelling to North Woodstock, where the motel was located.

We found the place easily enough: a series of quaint wooden buildings by the roadside. The owner, who claimed that he was of Irish descent, showed us into a simple twin-bedded room with an en suite bathroom. Although the room was rather dark and tasteless, we were happy as it was so quiet here. We later discovered that there was a graveyard on the other side of the road!

Once we had washed and rested, we drove up to The Flume, which was a short distance north of North Woodstock. We parked in a large car park, walked into the visitor centre and paid \$7 each to enter the National Park. A little minibus brought us to the start of a trail, and off we went on foot. The Flume was a very dramatic narrow gorge, down which a river rushed in a series of spectacular waterfalls. We both agreed that it looked like a scene depicted in the pages of the *National Geographic* magazine.



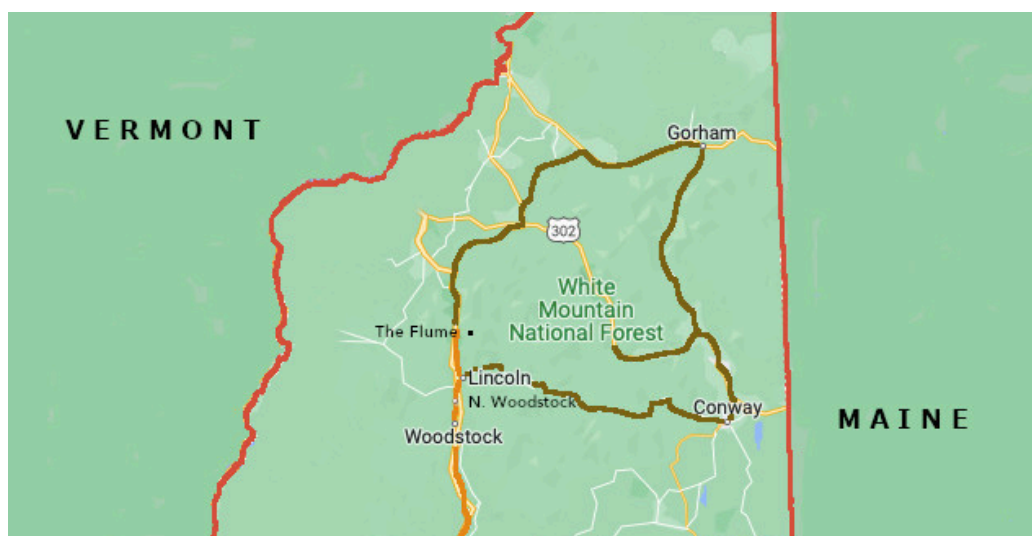
*The Flume, New Hampshire*

We climbed up and up, and eventually arrived at a more level area. Leaving the gorge behind, we followed the path as it wound its way downwards. Here we admired some fine views, a beautiful covered bridge, a large pool, and trees growing over rocks with their roots wrapped around them.

We finally returned to the car park and drove back to North Woodstock, where we had a look at the restaurants. As a souvenir shop was still open, we went in to have a look and I bought a gift for a friend. Before leaving, we asked the young lady where we should eat. She recommended the Woodstock Inn, which was nearby. This turned out to be situated in a former railway station. As it was packed, we had to wait at the bar, sipping glasses of water, until we were summoned by a little electric bleeper that Colm had been given. We were then led into a relatively small but full dining room that was adorned with railroad memorabilia. We both ordered bowls of 'Hobo' soup: a dark brown liquid containing bread and topped with melted cheese. For the main course, Colm ate a large helping of chicken and salad, and I asked for a mountain of Mexican *nachos* with beef, cheese and a topping of soured cream. It was tasty enough until my mouth was attacked by a piece of chilli and the dish began to go a little cold. In the end I had to leave quite a lot of the meal uneaten as I ran out of space. A couple sitting opposite was curious about us and our food, and so we exchanged some pleasantries.



We finally paid up – the cost was quite reasonable for such good food – and left for our motel, where we prepared for bed. It had been a very pleasant introduction to New Hampshire.



Wednesday, 7 October

Both of us slept quite well. When ready this morning, we drove back to the restaurant where we had been on the previous evening and had a very good breakfast. Both of us started with orange juice and oatmeal porridge. I then had a dish called The Duke's Feast: two fried eggs, sausage (actually sausage meat), French fries and bread, followed by a couple of sticky buns. I also tried some blueberry jelly on toast. This large repast was quite reasonably priced; we got a ten-per cent discount by showing our checks for the previous evening's meal.

Thus fortified, we left and returned to the gift shop nearby, where Colm bought his sister a present. We then drove to nearby Lincoln and along the famous Kancamagus Highway. The views of the nearby White Mountains, which were carpeted with trees, the vivid fall foliage and the rushing rivers were quite spectacular; we stopped several times to admire the scenery and take photographs.



*View from the Kancamagus Highway, New Hampshire*

We drove for some time – there was quite a lot of traffic on the road – and finally stopped at a pretty spot where a river splashed over rocks. The leaves of the trees that bordered the river had turned a vivid shade of red. Following a path, we walked briskly around the lake and returned to the car.

We then drove on to Conway, which turned out to be an unsightly place full of heavy traffic, and turned northwards for Mount Washington. We soon reached the enormous car park and visitor centre. As the summit of the mountain was eight miles away (too far for walking) and a bus to the summit would cost us \$20 each, we finally decided to ignore the warnings that Bud had given to us about driving to the top, and pay just \$21 for the car.

Before we did this, however, we ate a simple lunch of cookies, tiny Snickers bars, chocolates and apples that Rita had given us. Afterwards, I experimented with the two low gears of the car and, satisfied that I would be able to drive uphill, paid the fee for the car. In return for our money we received a large envelope and a cassette tape. On the envelope were instructions on how to drive the car up and down, and inside was a sticker for the car, proclaiming that it had driven to the top of the mountain, and also a humorous certificate stating that the driver had completed the ascent and descent. We discovered that we could not play the tape as the car was equipped with only a radio and a CD player.

Up I drove in second gear and then, after a while, changed down to first. Although the ascent was fairly steep, it was not as hair-raising as we had been led to believe; in fact, it was good fun. As I had to concentrate on the narrow road and the traffic coming down, I was unable to see much of my surroundings, but we stopped now and then to admire the vista and allow the car to cool down. The Nissan was certainly getting a run for its money! Although the views were dramatic, they were not suitable for photography because of the mist.



*The summit of Mount Washington, White Mountains, New Hampshire*

We finally completed the eight-mile drive and arrived at the summit, which was ruined by the presence of car parks, a large building, and either television or radio masts. As it was bitterly cold and windy, we donned our warm jackets and gloves. I wore my sunglasses and Colm took my cap. Fortunately we had arrived just at the right moment, for the mist had disappeared and now it was sunny and clear; at the bottom of the mountain a notice had informed us that visibility was down to 100 feet. I took photographs of the stunning views and snapped a shot of a little steam train chugging up the side of the mountain just before a large cloud appeared and

obliterated the view. However, I photographed the train again as it reached the top, with clouds of black smoke belching out of the chimney.



*The steam train ascending Mount Washington, the White Mountains, New Hampshire*

After this we retreated into the warmth of the visitor centre, where we treated ourselves to cups of hot tea and something to eat. Refreshed and warmed up, we went back outside and left shortly afterwards. I drove down gingerly, mostly in first gear, and stopped the car frequently. At a lower level, Colm decided to walk to the bottom and set off briskly while I scrambled over some rocks to observe the view. By the time I caught up with Colm, he had almost reached the bottom. It was lovely now as the light was better and most of the people were leaving. When we arrived back at the ticket office, I returned the tape and was given a CD of the commentary that we had missed. We listened to it as we drove away.

We now headed northwards, nearly reaching Gorham, and returned to North Woodstock by a road that skirted the northern area of the White Mountains. We then dropped down to Carroll. Once again the views were very pleasant. As we drove, the light began to fade and so it was almost dark when we returned to North Woodstock. On our way back we had passed Franconia Notch and The Flume, where we had been the previous day.



Leaving our things in the car, we returned to 'our' restaurant, the Woodstock Inn, and once again waited at the bar for a table. This time I tried a glass of a locally-made light beer flavoured with maple syrup, which was quite pleasant. We were eventually led into a large room in the restaurant, where we ordered our food. This time we skipped the starters and ordered seafood dishes, which turned out to be very tasty. For dessert I had warm blueberry crumble topped with ice cream and cream, which effectively deadened the slightly intoxicating effect of the beer. Colm's dessert was called a Mississippi Mud Slide!

After this pleasant and leisurely meal, we left and returned to our room, where I took a welcome shower and wrote some of my diary, which had got quite far behind. I filled in the Mount Washington certificates and later we retired to bed, pleased with the day's tour.

Thursday, 8 October

A dull, wet morning; we had noticed clouds gathering during the previous evening and had remembered that Rita had told us that rain would be forthcoming. We rose at our leisure and drove to the Woodstock Inn for breakfast, availing of the ten per cent discount once again. I ordered what I had eaten on the previous morning, though with some variations. This time we were given little jugs of maple syrup to pour over our oatmeal; it was very pleasant.



Afterwards we wandered across the road to the gift shop, where I bought a blue necklace for my mother. One great advantage of buying goods in this state was that tax was not added to the advertised price, as in other states. This done, we set off on today's planned journey to Maine by taking Route 175 southwards to Campton, passing fine rural scenery, flaming red foliage, rivers, and fine clapboard houses and barns. The countryside was enchanting; the atmosphere was tranquil – almost

sleepy – and the perfectly smooth roads were virtually traffic-free. The rain and the dull light seemed to accentuate the fall colours. We stopped in Holderness to admire a village green edged with trees and elegant lamps; beyond we could see some fine period buildings. We drove nearer to have a look at them; as Colm had guessed, they formed part of a school. A lady emerged from the nicest building, which looked more like a house, and told us that it had been burned down at some period in the past and then rebuilt.

From here we now made our way to Lake Winnepesaukee by driving towards Meredith. The sophisticated countryside quickly disappeared and, as we approached this more touristy region, the traffic increased and the surroundings became tacky: hotels, motels and restaurants now lined the road. We got glimpses of the large lake and boats in harbours, but nothing looked particularly impressive in the mist and rain.

We then branched off on to Route 11, an uninteresting road, and drove to Rochester, where we stopped in the municipal car park for lunch in the car. We had bought some cookies, fruit and water on the way. When we had finished eating and left the town, we took a wrong turn and got lost. We had to pull into a gas station and ask for directions; a lady kindly drew a map for me and wrote down some instructions. By following these, we joined Route 9 and crossed into Maine via South Berwick.

As it was now raining heavily, we could see very little and so the journey became rather uninteresting. We found our way north-eastwards to Kennebunkport, which turned out to be a rather nondescript place full of tourists and tourist coaches. As neither of us was in the humour to go tramping about in the rain, we drove on to Bideford Point, where we found exclusive houses and a misty view of the grey sea. From here we drove to Bideford town, which turned out to be quite large. Here I parked the car and, as the rain had eased a little, we took a walk around some of the streets. Getting the car out of the parking space proved to be difficult for me, as I had not yet mastered tight manoeuvres; during the procedure I managed to bump into the car just behind me just as the lady who owned it came along. She went berserk, but Colm managed to calm her down. He pointed out that no damage had been done, explained that we were both from Ireland and had never driven in America before, and got her talking about something else. We all parted on good terms. However, as I was tired by now, the experience upset me, and I found it difficult to gather my wits and move the car out of the tight space.

Following the lady's advice, we drove up through Saco to West Scarborough in search of accommodation among the rows of motels. When they began to thin out, we had to turn back. Colm popped into a couple of them and came out of the second one brandishing a set of keys. We looked at the room – it was well appointed though near the road – and said yes to an oriental lady with a tiny baby. Using my credit card, I paid her \$58.85.

Despite the horrible touristy area in which the motel was situated, we were happy with the room. We now had showers and I wrote my diary. When ready, we then set out in the dark and rain in search of a restaurant that the lady had recommended. Although we followed her instructions, we could not find it. As the journey had involved driving down an unlit road, we were glad to turn back. I found driving in these conditions very confusing and stressful, and by now I was very tired and hungry. We returned to the main road to ask for instructions, and ended up going down the same road again for about three miles. When at last we found the restaurant, it was about to close at eight o'clock. We could not believe it! We returned to our road, tried a couple of other places that were either closed or

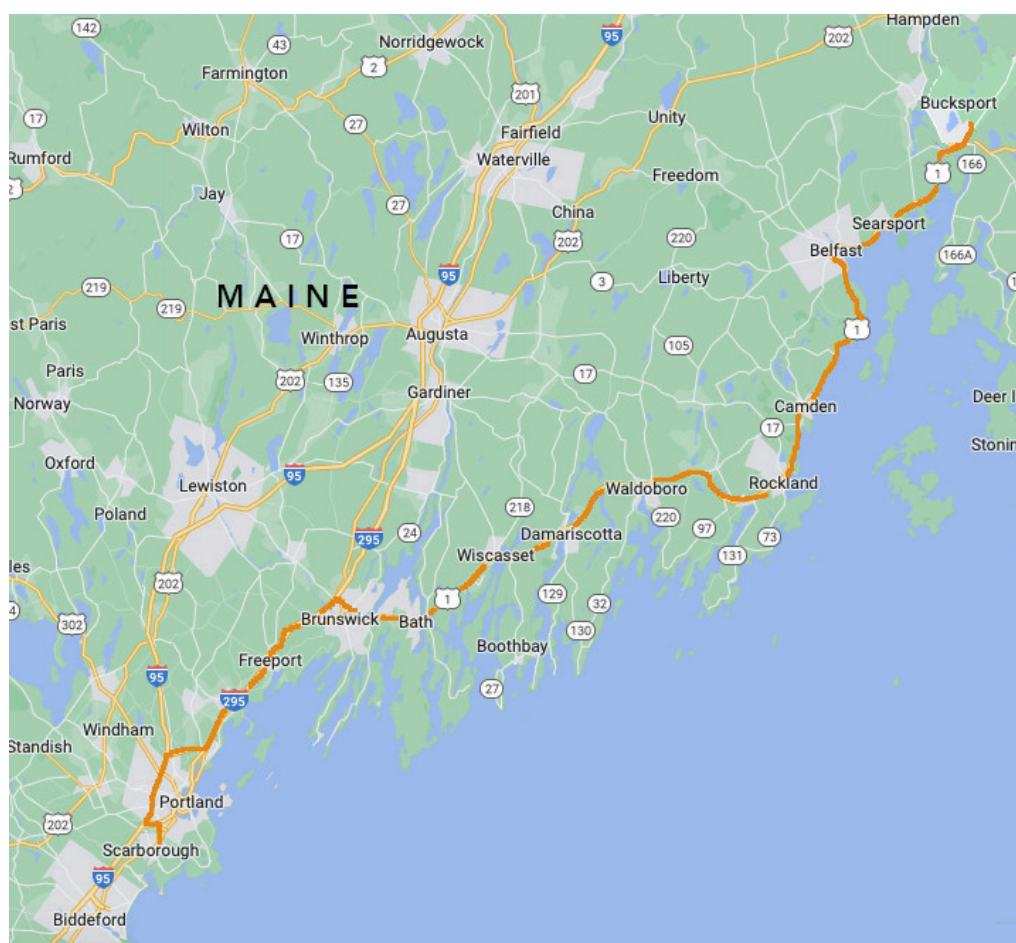


about to close, and ended up driving a considerable distance to get to a Burger King diner, where we ate an indifferent and inadequate meal.

I was very glad to return to our motel, write my diary, half watch a film on television, and go to bed. With the exception of the initial stages of our journey, today had been a bit of a disaster.

Friday, 9 October

I reluctantly dragged myself out of bed this morning at about eight o'clock, having slept quite well. When ready, we checked out and drove along the road to a nice restaurant, where we enjoyed a very big breakfast. We asked for oatmeal and were given two bowls containing a veritable mountain of porridge. I then was presented with toast and a large plateful of eggs, bacon and pancakes. Earlier we had been given a large jug of maple syrup, which I now poured on the pancakes. They were delicious.



We left feeling stuffed and set off in the car; all we wanted to do was get away from this uninteresting place. We took Route 1, which brought us up to Portland, and found our way on to the I-95. The journey was monotonous: it was just a busy highway and the weather conditions were dreadful. Because of the driving rain and mist, all the cars had their headlights on. As I had to concentrate carefully on the road ahead, I saw nothing. We wondered if it was really worth making our planned journey up to Mount Desert Island.

After Topsham, we came to Bath and rejoined Route 1, which became a little less busy. We passed a few inlets from the sea and drove through a few interesting

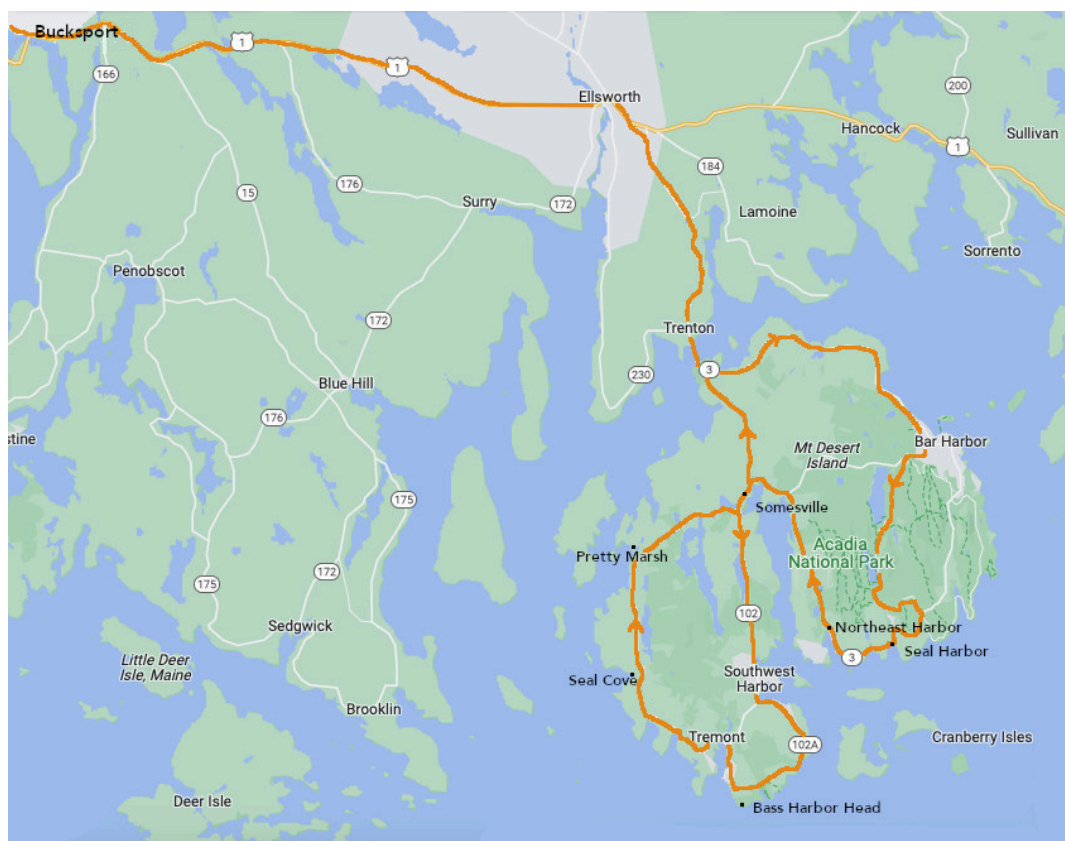
small towns; one of them was called Belfast! Somewhere near Searsport we turned off the road and headed towards the sea. We stopped at the end of a dead-end road (a cul-de-sac) and went out in the drizzling rain to walk along the water's edge.

We did not spend much time outdoors; we returned to the car for a light lunch of fruit and water, then pushed the seats back and had a snooze.

Later we resumed our journey and headed towards Bucksport, crossing a large, impressive suspension bridge. We stopped at a very impressive gift shop to use the rest room, buy some postcards and chat to the elderly lady behind the counter. She must have been in her eighties as her daughter was fifty-six! Colm asked her about accommodation in the area, and she recommended a couple of motels nearby.

We found them easily – one was beside Burger King – and got a quiet room around the back of the Motor Inn. Here we threw the windows and door open as the place stank of cigarette smoke, then rested. We later drove into the nearby town centre, where we had a look in a very nice bookshop, and then went to a pleasant restaurant, where we had a good meal of soup, haddock with potatoes and salad, and raspberry pie with ice cream. At the other side of the dining room, a lady played a guitar and sang. The music was neither too bad nor too loud.

By the time we had finished eating, the rain had eased off and so we were able to take a short walk up and down the street. There were one or two old buildings, but little else of interest. We then drove back to our motel, where I finally brought my diary up to date, and went to bed at a reasonable hour.



Saturday, 10 October

I slept very well through the night – the best sleep so far here – and was woken by Colm getting up at about half past seven. I rose shortly afterwards and had a shower. Despite the grey sky and continuing rain, we decided to go ahead and drive around Mount Desert Island. En route, about seven miles outside Bucksport, we

stopped at Duffy's Restaurant (recommended by the lady in the motel) and went in for breakfast. We both ordered orange juice, oatmeal and coffee; Colm asked for traditional bacon and eggs and I tried the blueberry pancakes, which were tasty and very filling. Afterwards I felt a little queasy; perhaps it was because of the coffee or the heavy food. Before leaving, I asked for a glass of water.

We now drove on for another twelve miles or so until we reached the ugly outskirts of Ellsworth, then turned southwards for Mount Desert Island. This was reached by crossing a bridge. We took the road for Bar Harbor and finally turned off it for the Acadia Park visitor centre. We hopped out of the car, braving the rain, and ran inside to have a look around. We asked how much the admission charge would be and we were advised to watch a video that was about to begin in a nearby auditorium. This turned out to be a very interesting introduction to the park and it enabled us to see the place in good weather.

We left the centre after we had bought some postcards and drove into the park, where we were expecting to find the ticket office, but did not find one. We now made our way to Bar Harbor, where we had a look around, and then returned to the park. Seeing a sign for Cadillac Mountain, we took the road and drove up to the 1,530 foot summit. As the famous mountain was covered in mist, we saw absolutely nothing. We went into a gift shop, where we bought more postcards, and Colm bought himself a waterproof poncho.

We then drove down, returned to the Park Loop Road and stopped at a sign for Bubble Pond. This turned out to be a small but pretty lake surrounded by trees with blazing red leaves. As the rain had now eased off considerably, we were able to take a good walk along one side of the lake and back. The colours of the leaves on the trees here were quite astonishing: dark green, light green, yellow, gold, and bright red. We returned to the car park and walked towards Eagle Lake, where we stopped to admire a small spot of breathtaking beauty because of the colour of the leaves. I wished that I had brought the camera with me. We scrambled down to the edge of the lake, which was quite big. Unfortunately most of the surrounding scenery was lost in the mist.

Our next stop was Bubble Rock: a low hill that we decided to climb. Precariously balanced near the edge at the top was a large boulder, the 'Bubble', beneath which was a sheer drop. We could just about see the bottom of the hill through the mist. Despite the bad weather, it was evident that this park was very beautiful.

When we returned to the car at about 2.30, we lunched on some fruit and water taken from the tap in the motel. The water tasted dreadful and we had to pour it away. When we then looked at a map of the island, we discovered why we had not encountered a ticket office: we had accidentally driven in the wrong way!

We now set off again, skirting the Jordan Pond and passing Jordan Pond House. We now took a road out to Seal Harbor and drove at a leisurely speed along the coast, passing beautiful trees, bays and fine clapboard houses. This area looked quite exclusive and there were no motels or gaudy signs. We finally arrived in Northeast Harbor, a pretty little town of clapboard buildings and high-class shops. We walked along the main street, window shopping, and had a look in a couple of small art shops. In one of them, we found some fine impressionistic paintings by a local artist and unusual pieces of handmade jewellery. Colm admired a brooch but could not make up his mind if he would buy it for his sister or not.

We then left the art shop, walked down to the end of the street and returned; by then Colm had made up his mind about the brooch. We went back into the shop and he bought it.

This done, we drove off and made our way up Somes Sound and turned down the other side via the pretty village of Somesville, dropping down to Southwest Harbor – another town full of character and elegance. We both agreed that living here would be very pleasant. We then did a circle around the southernmost tip of the island and stopped to take a look at Bass Harbor Head Light Station: a tiny building overlooking a fine panoramic view of sea and at least eleven islands.

From here we drove up through Bass Harbor to Seal Cove and Seal Cove Pond, a beautiful lake surrounded by wonderful red trees, and finally passed Pretty Marsh on our way back to Somesville. From here we drove up to Ellsworth, ending our enjoyable tour of the island. As we made our way back to the mainland, heavy rain engulfed us once again.

We returned to our motel at about six o'clock, had showers, changed our clothes and drove to the town centre, where we dined in the Riverview Restaurant. I ate a seafood dish consisting of shrimps, clams, baked potatoes and coleslaw, followed by a dessert called apple crisp: a type of apple crumble topped with cream. Before returning to the motel, we took a walk around the local streets and found a Catholic church that was close to several other elegant churches of different denominations.

Back in our room I wrote my diary and some postcards before retiring to bed.