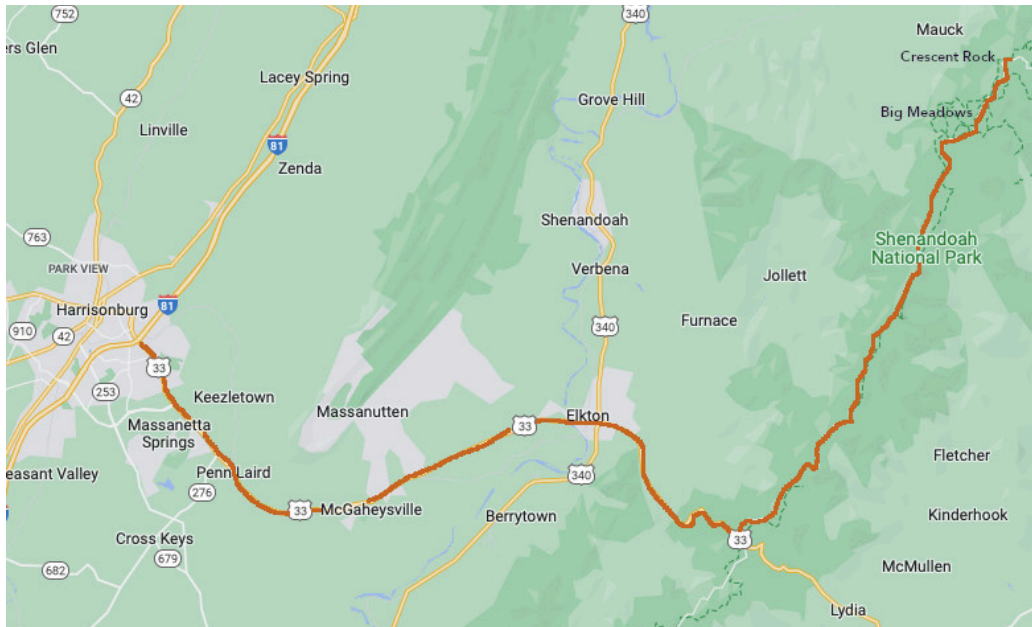


5 – VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA AND PENNSYLVANIA



Sunday, 21 May

A fine sunny morning. At about 8 o'clock we checked out of the motel, drove around the corner to a restaurant, and had breakfast. The man in charge was interested to discover that we were Irish; maybe he had Irish ancestry.



A view from the Shenandoah Skyline Drive, and the South River Cascade, Virginia

We then left and made our way back to the Skyline Drive after breakfast. Like the previous day, the scenery was impressive, thanks to the superb weather. We changed into lighter clothes when we stopped and went for a walk at the South

River Overlook. We clambered downhill and made our way to an impressive waterfall, the South River Cascade. We eventually returned to the car and drove on to Big Meadows, where we had an indifferent lunch in a restaurant, and Colm rang home, using my card.

When he had finished his call, we drove just as far as Crescent Rock Overlook and stopped. Colm went off for a short walk and I had a snooze in the car. He returned just as I woke up. He then rested and I walked to Betty's Rock, where I was able to admire a fine panoramic view of the plain and the mountains ahead. By now it had clouded over and had turned quite windy and chilly.

I eventually returned to the car and we drove back to the restaurant, where we found more telephones; Colm rang home once again. Afterwards we treated ourselves to cookies and large disposable cups of tea. As we had noticed that the dinner menu looked quite good, and as accommodation was available in nearby log cabins, we discussed the possibility of staying the night here. We discovered that a twin room was available for about \$76. Once we had been shown a photograph of the room, we booked for one night and set about finding the place, using a map that had been given to us. Our cute little cabin, named 'Maple', contained two en suite bedrooms. We brought in our luggage from the car, and after Colm had given himself a wash we went off for another ramble along various confusing trails. We ended up at the top of a hill, from which we had a wonderful view of the surrounding wooded mountains.



Our cabin at Skyland Lodge, Shenandoah National Park, Virginia

We then returned to the restaurant, where we were served by a Romanian girl named Gina. We had a good meal starting with beef and vegetable soup, which was followed by a main course of turkey with stuffing, potatoes, a small helping of French beans, and a mountain of bread. For dessert I chose blackberry cobbler. I washed down the meal with a nice glass of white wine. When we finished, we thanked the waitress, paid for the food, and went outdoors to view the dramatic, though quite rapid, sunset.

We then returned to our cabin, where we chatted a little, then Colm went to bed early. I wrote my diary and read a little before hitting the sack.

Monday, 22 May

I slept very well during the night and woke at about 7.30 a.m.; although chilly outside, it was another sunny morning with a clear blue sky. We sauntered over to the restaurant at about eight o'clock and were served by a smiling Gina, who fetched what we wanted just when we needed it. After drinking orange juice and eating a bowl of porridge, Colm was given a very small helping of melon and I received an excellent concoction of fruit and yogurt. Afterwards I attacked a plate of fried eggs, ham and hash browns, and we both finished with green tea.

We then went out for a pleasant walk along some of the local trails for a little over an hour, after which we returned to our log cabin. Colm changed into his shorts and set off again, but I stayed put as my right sandal had been rubbing against the bottom of my big toe, causing a painful blister to appear. I put on warm clothes, sat outside between the restaurant and office, and read a book for a while. As it became too cold, I moved indoors to the sitting room near the office, where I encountered a girl who was having trouble trying to connect to the Internet on her Sony laptop. It was obvious that she was not American. When I asked her if I could connect my iPod to her computer, she said yes, and I walked back to our cabin to collect the cable.

When I returned, I introduced myself. I discovered that the young lady, Georgina, was also from Romania, and that she shared a room with Gina. While connecting my iPod to her computer, we chatted. She told me that she had been in America for only one month, that she had lived in Germany, and that she spoke both German and Spanish. I was enchanted by her as she was such a lovely and gentle type of girl – so much more refined than some of the Americans whom we had met.

I was now delighted to discover that all my photographs were still in the iPod. As Georgina had never seen an iPod before, I let her listen to some music and was delighted to discover that she liked music by Mozart, Tchaikovsky and even Buxtehude. At the end of our conversation, when she switched off her computer, she extended her hand and I shook it. Delighted to have had the pleasure of some agreeable female company, I felt rather lonely after she had left the room.

I then returned to the cabin, where I met Colm, and we walked to the restaurant for lunch. Colm went off walking again immediately afterwards and I went back to our room for a good siesta. Later I went out for a gentle stroll, then sat in the sun, reading.

After a while I got a mug of tea and spent some time in the sitting room reading as best as I could with the television on. When I returned to the cabin, Colm was there and so we made our way to the restaurant in due course. This evening I started with salad, then both of us ate an unfamiliar type of fish, the name of which we subsequently forgot; it was excellent. I finished with a generous scoop of blueberry ice cream and washed the meal down with a glass of Chardonnay.

We then moved to the sitting room, where we perused the morning's *Washington Post* and watched another dramatic sunset. It had been a pleasantly relaxing day for me; Colm was happy to have walked ten miles or so.

Tuesday, 23 May

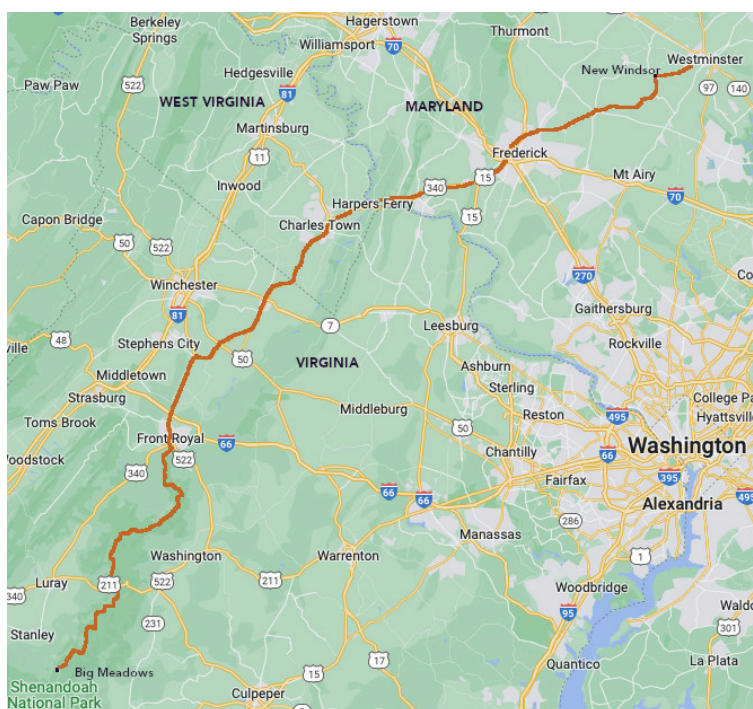
Up at seven o'clock after another peaceful night's sleep. Although bright and sunny, it was very chilly outside. When we went to the restaurant for breakfast, Gina greeted us with a welcoming smile and remembered most of what we had ordered on the previous morning. I had seen Georgina on entering the restaurant, and had slipped her a piece of paper on which I had written my name, address and

email address. Shortly afterwards she reappeared and flashed me a big smile. I was very sorry to be leaving this lovely place and the company of these two charming young ladies.



A view from the Appalachian Trail in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia

When we checked out, I told the lady that I had enjoyed my stay and that I had been very impressed by the two Romanian girls. We left, drove northwards, got out at one of the lookovers and went off for a one-and-a-half-hour walk along the Appalachian Trail. We bumped into our friend – the man we had met a few days previously and who had been walking along the Appalachian Trail – and learned that his name was George.



We then returned to the car and set off again, driving past more superb scenery. We finally dropped down to Front Royal, leaving the wonderful mountains behind. We were now out of the Shenandoah National Park and back in 'civilization'. Here

we found a small restaurant and sat down to eat a cheap and cheerful lunch consisting of macaroni cheese, baked beans, hot dogs and coleslaw – an ‘explosive’ combination, as I called it.



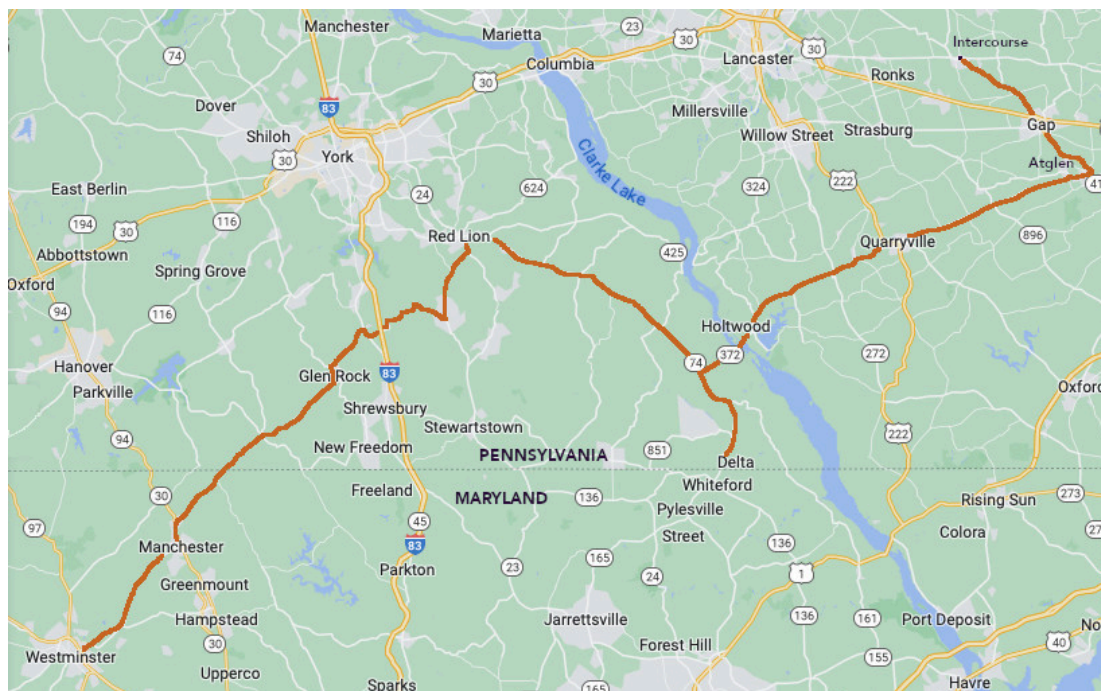
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

We were off again before two o'clock and driving along Route 31. We found our way into a corner of West Virginia and, passing through some nondescript scenery, reached Harpers Ferry: a little town with historical associations. We stopped in a 'park and ride' car park and, for \$6, travelled by shuttle bus to the town centre (or lower town, as it was officially called). Although most of the buildings had been restored and we saw quite a number of modern intrusions (traffic was allowed on the roads, though parking was prohibited), it was quite pretty. We ambled about, admiring the various buildings and looking into several little shops and museums. We learned about the Lewis and Clark Expedition across the newly-acquired western portion of the country after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and also about John Brown, the abolitionist who tried to take over the United States arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. During our short stay, we stepped into a rough-and-ready café, where we drank green tea and ate some cookies. Many of the public buildings, including the Catholic church, were closed.

Our last two stops were a derelict house that had been deliberately left in this state in order to show its past history, then a good bookshop. At about five o'clock we returned in the shuttle bus to the car park. With Colm at the wheel, we left, crossed a bridge and returned to Virginia. We then crossed another bridge, this time over the Potomac River, and found ourselves in Maryland.

We now drove through some gently rolling countryside full of fields, farms, barns and grain stores: a very pleasing landscape. Although we passed through several villages, none of them offered any accommodation. We had hoped to find somewhere in the next big town, Frederick, but we merely skirted it. Once again we found ourselves travelling along a fine country road. We stopped briefly in Windsor and I asked a lady where we might find a hotel nearby. She told us to drive on to Westminster, where we would find a Best Western Hotel. Although this sounded expensive (and looked it when we arrived), we decided to take a room for \$89. Unfortunately, we ended up in a smoker's room. Once ensconced here, we took showers and went out to the nearby Baugher's restaurant, where we had a rather average meal that fortunately was not too expensive.

Afterwards, we ambled down to the town centre, the most interesting part of which was the elegant university. There were also a few fine old houses to be seen. Colm got some more money out of an ATM, and we returned to the hotel. Back in our room I checked my emails and answered a questionnaire about Colonial Williamsburg, which took some time to complete. I then wrote my diary and went to bed.



Wednesday, 24 May

Because of the amount of noise and bustle in the hotel, we woke early. We got up at seven and went downstairs to the breakfast room, where Colm just helped himself to some orange juice, some fruit and a boiled egg, then went off to the nearby restaurant for his obligatory bowl of porridge and a couple of pancakes. I stayed put, drank some tea, made a waffle, and ate it with a boiled egg. I finished with a banana and, before leaving, took a couple of muffins and two bananas for lunch.

We left in good time and set off in the direction of Pennsylvania. However, we went astray when trying to leave a busy main road in order to get on to Route 27. Fortunately I had obtained a detailed map of the area, which now came to the rescue. Off we went in a north-westerly direction and headed for Manchester. Then, taking various minor roads, we found our way to Glen Rock, in Pennsylvania, then Red Lion. By now we were passing through pleasant rolling pastureland with farms here and there. From Red Lion we dropped down to Delta, right on the border with Maryland, where we discovered that we had gone too far and had missed a turn. We drove back the way we had come, found Route 372 and crossed the mighty Susquehanna River.

As we continued along this road, we began to notice an occasional buggy driven by a member of the Amish community. As we neared the part of Lancaster County that we had come to see, it became more built up. We went as far as Atglen, then swung northwards to Route 340, where the surroundings became commercialized and rather brash. At the small village of Intercourse (what an odd name!) we started to look for accommodation. There were no vacant rooms in a small inn, but we

secured a good room in the rather up-market Travelers Rest Motel for about \$79. As we were hot and weary by now, we were glad to finish our journey. The lady at the reception desk was very helpful and told us about things that we could see and do in the area.

When ready, we walked a short distance to the Stoltzfus Farm Restaurant, where we sat at a long table and were served an enormous meal of various unfamiliar dishes. We were given about four different cold starters, including a selection of cooked vegetables, apple sauce, apple butter, and pickled cabbage (chow-chow). For the main course we had chicken, sausage, meatloaf, potato, pasta, sweetcorn and beans, and for dessert we had traditional shoofly pie (made of pie shell and molasses) and carrot cake, both served with ice cream. We washed all this down with iced tea. The meal cost a mere \$16, which we had paid before being seated.

As we felt so stuffed and drowsy afterwards, we returned to the motel and had a good nap. We then walked to the village and had a look around; there was little to be seen apart from a shop displaying and selling Amish quilts. Some of them were very intricate and beautiful; they were quite expensive to buy. We also popped into a shop that sold reproductions of paintings. When we ambled back to our motel, we expressed our disappointment in the place. It had been unashamedly commercialized, and traffic roared up and down the narrow road at a terrific speed.



Smucker's Farm House B&B, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

We then set off in the car and drove northwards into some delightful countryside. With a little bit of difficulty we found Smucker's Farm House B&B, which I had read about. I spoke to a bearded man who was working in the garden; he told me that they had rooms at \$69, which included continental breakfast. When Colm joined me, we found the man's wife, who showed us a simple bedroom and a nearby bathroom. I paid my share of the accommodation for the following night and we left.

Afterwards we drove a little farther, found a place to park the car, and had a walk along some of the country roads. Although it was very pleasant here, it was not very peaceful as cars continually whizzed past us. All around us was a peculiar and somewhat disturbing clash of eras: on one hand there were the Amish people, all dressed in a similar manner, in their horse-drawn buggies or on their scooters

and, on the other, the casually-dressed people of our time dashing about in their up-to-date cars.



A horse-drawn buggy and some typical rural scenery, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

We then went on a short drive around the area, admiring more fine scenery and then returned to Intercourse, where we had a light meal in the Best Western Restaurant. Behind us a large Amish family, all of whom were speaking Pennsylvanian Dutch, were celebrating a birthday. A waitress in traditional dress served them and spoke to them in the same language. (Before the meal I had gone in search of the men's room; I had passed an elderly Amish man with a long, white beard, and noticed the word *Boova* over the door from which he had emerged. A sign marked *Madel* hung over the door of the ladies' room.)

After our meal of starters and a salad, we went off for a gentle walk along the road, back into the countryside. By now the light was wonderful and so we were able to see the place at its best. We saw two balloons up in the sky, barely moving. In order to get off the road (there were no sidewalks), we crossed a field, then turned back.

We then returned to our comfortable motel, where I told the girl behind the reception desk that we would only be staying one night, and bought a small book about the Amish people. I then got chatting to another girl, who turned out to be Swedish. I eventually returned to our room, where I had a shower, washed some clothing, then wrote my diary before going to bed.