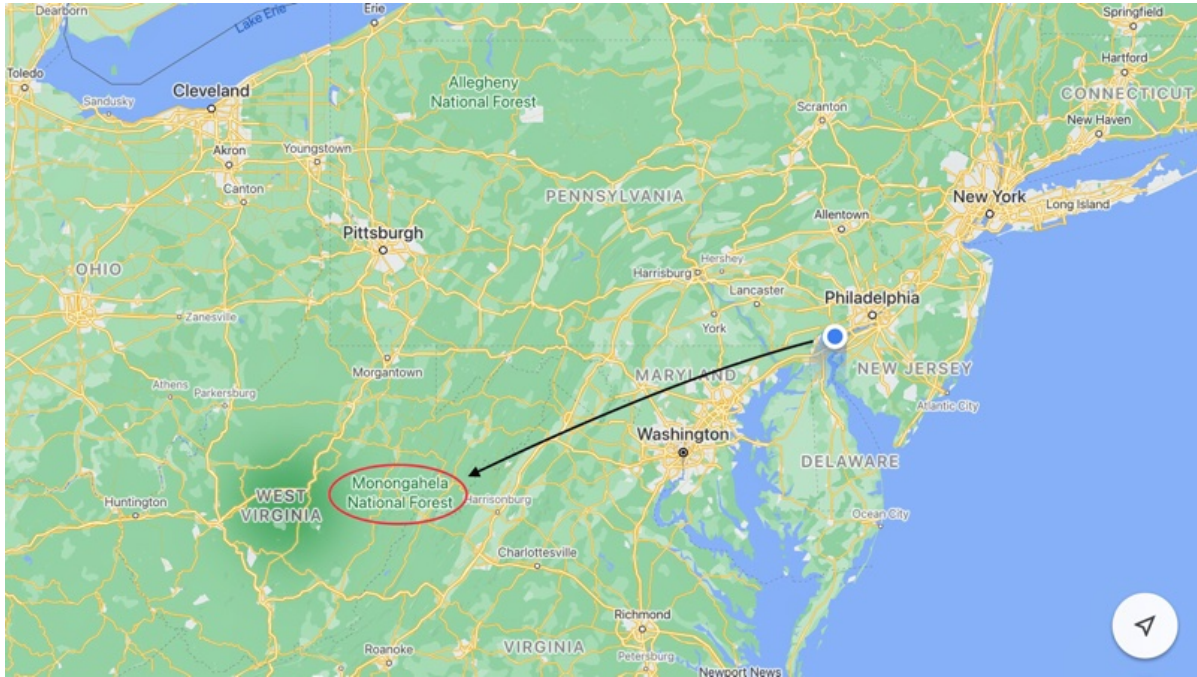


## Road Trip to West Virginia 2020



We enjoyed our late summer road trip to Virginia so much, we decided on another pandemic escape, this time further west to the fall foliage in Monongahela Nat'l Forest in West Virginia. It's easy to social distance in the wilderness!



It's the last week in October, and it looks like we caught autumn just in time! Judy caught this shot through the car windshield.



To break up the drive, we stopped overnight in Harrisonburg, VA, where I had read in a tourist brochure about Hank's Grille and their award winning slow-cooked barbecue.



I had a half-rack of dry-rub ribs with beans. The ribs were moist, tangy, and delicious, possibly the best I have ever eaten! Judy had the pulled pork with cheesy grits and collard greens. The pork was smoky and melt-in-your-mouth juicy, and she even ate all her greens!



Next day, we set off west into Pocahontas County in the rolling Allegheny Mountains, part of the Appalachian chain.



Our big-city blues melt away as we travel through tiny towns that time seems to have forgotten



Destination: Cass, WV, to ride “The Durbin Rocket”, a genuine 100 year old steam locomotive. It used to haul lumber from the forests — now it carries tourists, twice a day!



It's a perfect Indian Summer day as we steam alongside the Greenbrier River in an open air car. Riding the rails the old-fashioned way, and no masks needed out in the open air!



The scenery is beautiful, and...



...the fall colors are vibrant. This is just what we came for!



For \$330, you can rent the caboose overnight, like this intrepid couple did. The train drops you off on a spur in the middle of nowhere and picks you up the next day. Although it's fully furnished, with electricity & kitchen, we think that's a little too rustic for us!



During the drop-off, passengers can get off and stretch their legs. The conductor was very friendly and took our picture with the big engine!



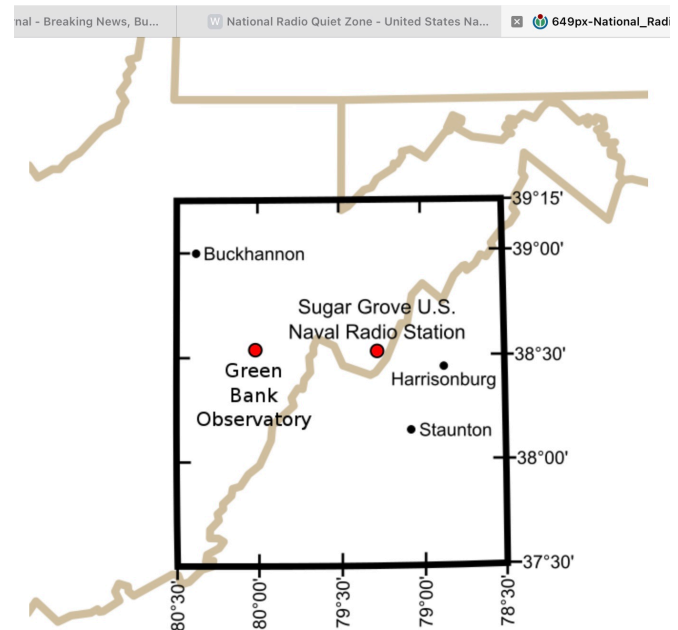
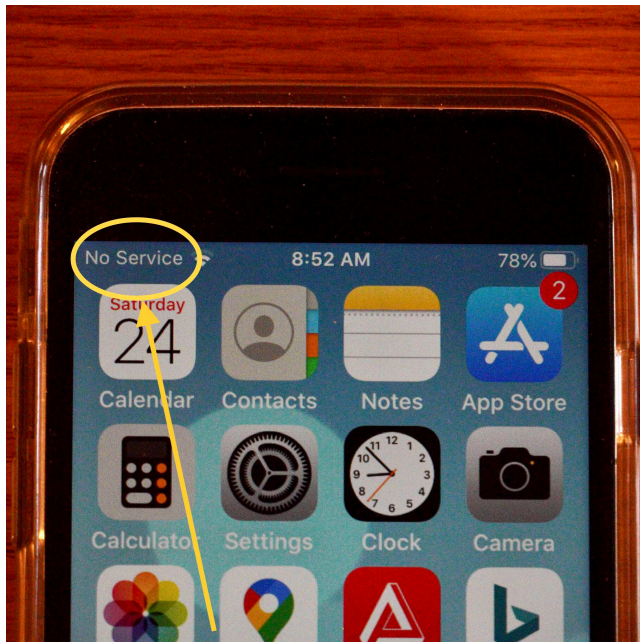
Time to head back; but the ride was so much fun, I made a short movie for my Grandson. If you'd like to view it, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtRobo7nRoA>



A short drive away, nestled in the mountains off a country road, we settle in at our B&B: "The Morning Glory Inn". I found it on a WV tourist website, and it was well-reviewed on TripAdvisor.



Inside, it's beautiful! Meticulously decorated & maintained, cozy & warm, yet roomy — we loved it! We almost just wanted to stay in that big comfy bed the whole day! And they left so much food for breakfast (including home-made bread), we didn't need lunch!



Here's something you don't see very often! There's no cell phone service at all because the entire region is part of the "Nat'l Radio Quiet Zone", established by the US Gov't in 1958. It restricts radio transmissions which can interfere with space research & NSA spy telescopes. The sparsely populated West Virginia mountain range is the perfect location for this.

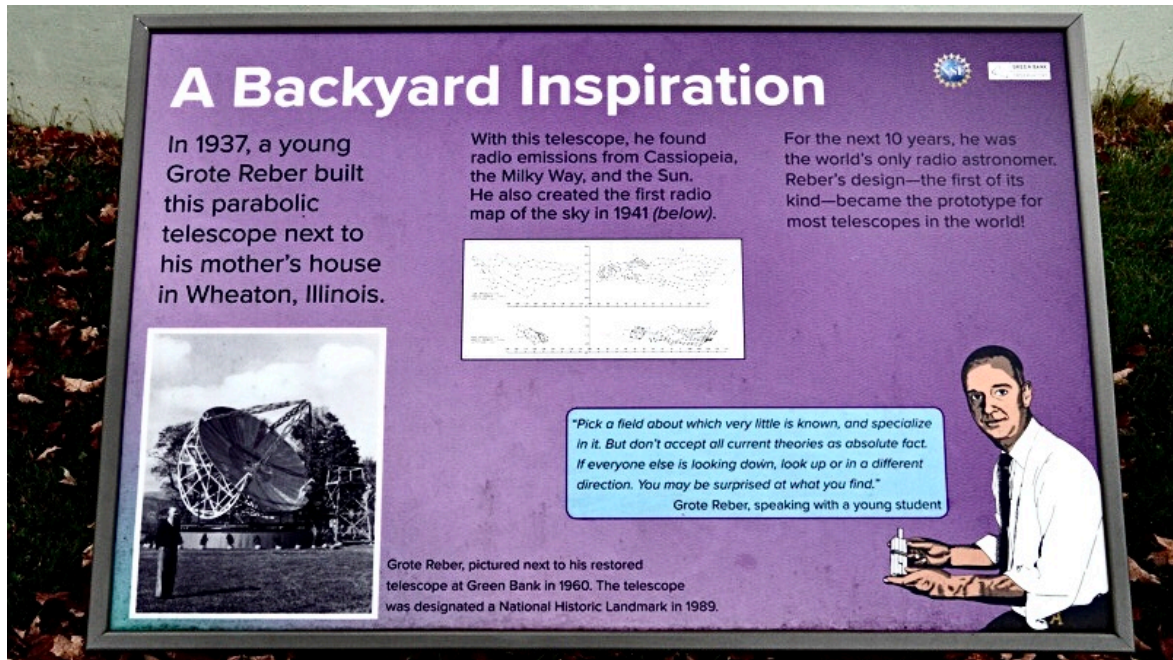




You can't visit the NSA site (technically, it "doesn't exist"), but you can visit the Green Bank Observatory, home of radio astronomy & the world's largest steerable radio telescope! Visitors are free to wander the grounds, and you can bet we're heading out to see it!



Here, the world's first parabolic radio telescope, built in 1937 by an electrical engineer/amateur ham radio operator in his mother's backyard. (I'm sure she nagged him to find a nice girl to settle down with instead of playing with his silly toy and making a mess in her yard...)



But, he made out well for himself! Let's hear it for nerds!

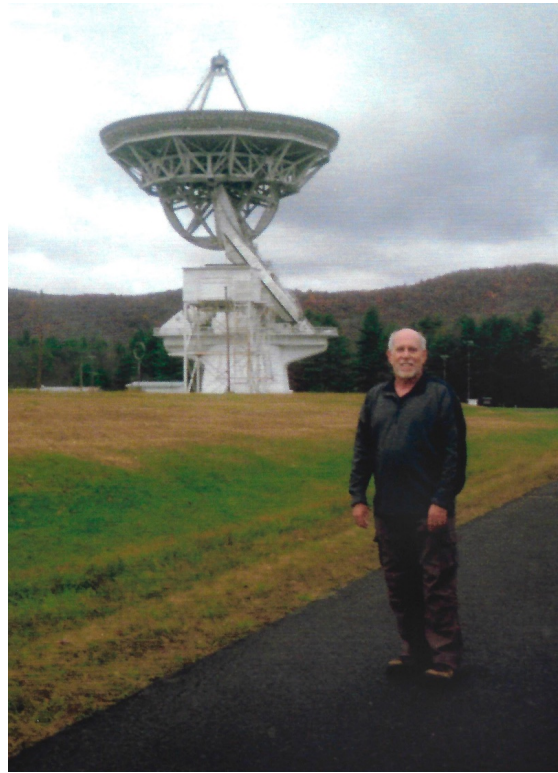
The instruments are so sensitive that once inside the grounds, ALL electronic devices are prohibited. No cell phones, no digital cameras, not even regular cars are allowed (because of spark plugs — all their vehicles run on diesel only).



With this knowledge in advance, I bought a disposable Kodak film camera at Wal-mart. The quality is pretty poor, but I wasn't going to pass up the photo opportunity!



There are seven telescopes spanning over 50 years of development. Most are still in use, ranging from pulsar and nebula scientific research, to GPS positioning and time clock standards, to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (...I bet they do some spying also).



Judy scans the skies for the return of Ancient Aliens!  
As a child of the Space Age, I am fascinated by these giant machines, yet I can't get over the incongruity of all this high technology just plunked down in the forest in the middle of nowhere.



Judy shows that science can be sexy as she poses with an antenna array. What a nice dish!



After a mile-and-a-half walk past the smaller telescopes, we finally approach the massive Green Bank Telescope, taller than the Statue of Liberty. I can't believe we can get this close. This is so cool!



There were very few people around. Luckily a young physics PhD stationed at the GBO was giving his visiting mother a tour & took our picture at the big dish. He also told us how he had taken the elevator & then ascended the catwalk to the top to replace one of the transducers in that big white box. His Mom looked kind of worried, but he looked pretty proud of himself!



*"Picard to Enterprise: Mission completed. Beam us up!"*  
For science nerds and sci-fi fans like us, this was a unique and exciting day!  
Fortunately, despite the threatening skies, it did not rain!



Unfortunately, the next day it did! We did a little hiking, but it was like walking through a cloud. Not much to see.... so much for the “scenic overlooks”....



*Ummph....* stand back while I move this tree out of the way.... *arrgh....* OK, that's better!



Continuing on our journey, we stop at a lookout point to admire the New River Gorge Bridge. When completed in 1977, it was the longest single span arch bridge in the world. It's now dropped to #4 (China has 1, 2, & 3), but it's still the longest in the Western Hemisphere.



It's also one of the highest (876 ft). In fact, every year they celebrate "Bridge Day", a big festival when daredevils actually **jump off** the bridge!! (parachutes required). We will have to return!



There's a winding boardwalk down to the best view. 178 steps — better be worth it!



....and it is! The bridge is graceful, almost elegant, and seems so slight for such a heavy load. (we don't look too bad, either, and that's because we're always happy when Living For Vacay!)

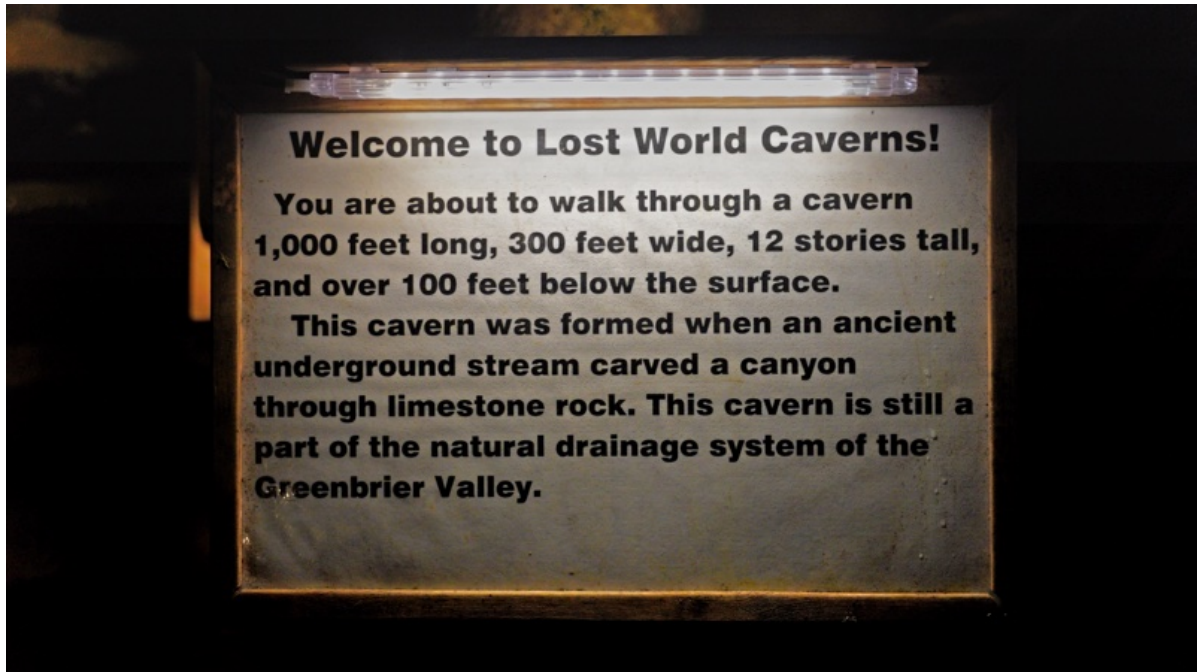




After the beautiful views, driving over the bridge is somewhat anticlimactic — it's so high up, there's not much to see!  
But it does get you from "point A" to "point B" in a straight line, which is the basic idea.



It's a new day and the weather has cleared up, but we'll be spending the morning inside....



## **Welcome to Lost World Caverns!**

**You are about to walk through a cavern  
1,000 feet long, 300 feet wide, 12 stories tall,  
and over 100 feet below the surface.**

**This cavern was formed when an ancient  
underground stream carved a canyon  
through limestone rock. This cavern is still a  
part of the natural drainage system of the  
Greenbrier Valley.**

....**deep** inside, in the Lost World Caverns, for some more amateur spelunking!  
The whole Appalachian range is riddled with caverns.



Sturdy wooden staircases lead you up and down through multiple levels on a self-guided tour.



While not as extensive or elaborate as our previous expedition into Luray Caverns, there are still a lot of very interesting rock formations in the Lost World Caverns.



This one looks like a big shaggy camel!



This one looks like a huge floating jellyfish!



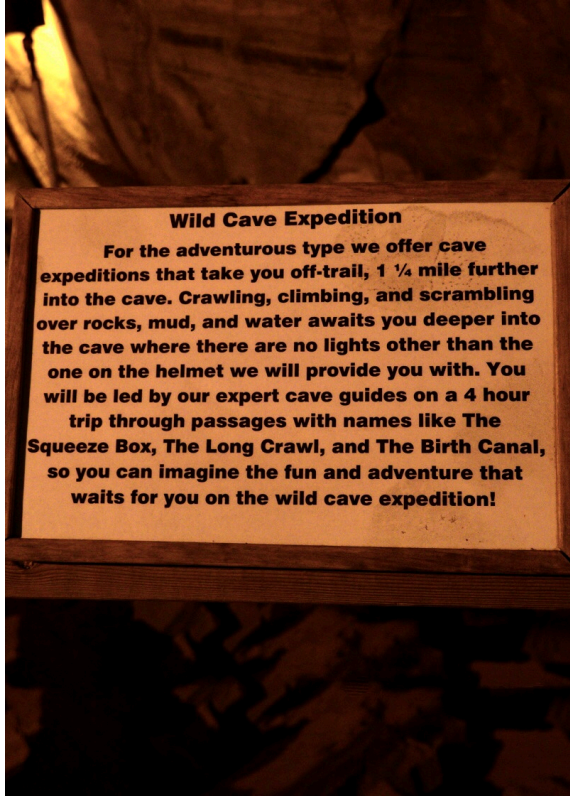
This one looks like a giant brain!  
I lean in to try to absorb some of its power....



And this one looks like a giant.... well.... you know....  
Too bad I could not lean in to absorb some of THAT power!



Finally, it looks like we have reached the end of the cave.  
But if you are REALLY adventurous, there's more —



The “Wild Cave Expedition”!! Read all about it! I asked Judy if she wanted to try it, but the look on her face says it all (and I agree — one trip through “The Birth Canal” is enough!).



Time to move on. At this point, we’ve truly got nowhere to go but up!



On the way back home, we stopped again for the night in Harrisonburg and couldn't resist returning for another meal at Hank's.



This time I went for broke and ordered the full rack!  
And I polished it off, although it was a little bit of a struggle at the end.  
(OK I admit I gave one rib to Judy — but only one!)



Final stop: on the way back home, a short detour back to Luray, VA to visit "Cooter's Garage" (we missed it last time around). It's an unabashed homage to one of the silliest (and most popular) TV shows ever created:



*"The Dukes of Hazzard" !!*

And I get to meet the star of the show:





The General Lee! What a thrill!



I have always loved hot cars. This pic is from 1979. I still miss my old '68 Mustang (....and my hair).



Look at that engine! It's a thing of beauty.  
And now I must confess: I watched that show every Friday night when I was in Med School.  
Mindless slapstick comedy, barroom brawls, car chases, country music, & Daisy Duke —  
after a week on the NYC hospital wards, it was just what the doctor ordered!  
Judy was impressed I can still sing the entire title song: 🎵🎵“Just two good ol’ boys...”🎵🎵



It's filled with memorabilia from the show, but the real reason it exists is to sell stuff (of course).  
We both bought caps!



The pandemic is horrible, for sure, but an end is in sight.  
Meanwhile, we've visited another less-traveled corner of America that  
we would never had considered before. We had a ton of fun, and still stayed safe.  
At least that's something positive!