
Stop 2. Shenandoah National Park

Arrival datetime: Tuesday April 2, 7:30PM
Sites visited: Shenandoah National Park
Accommodations: Peaks of Otter Lodge
States traveled: District of Columbia, Virginia

We arrived at the northern entrance to Shenandoah just around lunchtime. We had been there before and looked forward to lunch at the Panorama Restaurant. But it was closed. With just a few camera stops at overlooks, we made it to Skyland before 2:00PM. Of course, we had brought none of the hiking books we had bought on previous visits, so Jennifer perused them in the

bookstore while Michael sat in the restaurant waiting for food to arrive. We had remembered from previous visits that the service at the restaurant was very slow.

We did not mind the wait as the view was just as serenely beautiful as those on the eastward overlooks. Deep blue and misty powder blue mountains lapping



Shenandoah National Park from Skyline Drive.

over each other like waves. The river peeked out in sparkling blue intervals from the lush and green valley below. The valley was a bit scarred with buildings and roads, but it was not hard to imagine it checkered with fields and barns, as it must have been at the time of the musical Shenandoah. We sang as much of it as we could remember, “Look away, the rolling river.....”

Skyline Drive runs across the top of the Shenandoah mountains. So all the hikes start on a downhill and end on an uphill. We hiked a mile and a half downhill to the 83-foot South River Falls. Although we both work out all the time, playing tennis, running, and working out with weights, the way back was tough. For the rest of the drive, we were content to stop and enjoy views without hiking. The waning sun brought out deep oranges and greens in the mountains to the east. It intensified the blues to the west. Sunset was a perfectly round red ball that rolled almost imperceptibly behind midnight blue mountain ranges.

It was completely pitch black by the time we reached Peaks of Otter. Michael opened the curtains at 7:00AM expecting more mountain vistas. To our surprise, there was a lake outside our window. It appeared to be surrounded by a paved path. We walked around it before breakfast. The entire path was not paved, but it was an enjoyable walk. There was one mountain in view. Its brown and gold reflection was undisturbed on the calm lake. A small field of yellow daffodils greeted us as we approached the lodge.

We decided Peaks of Otter Lodge would be a great place to go to rest for a week. The beds were very firm, the restaurant



The lake at Peaks of Otter Lodge.

very pleasant, and the overall atmosphere completely relaxed. No phones or television in the rooms. A woman asked for an iron at the front desk and was told they had none.

But we had had enough rest in the hospital after five cycles of chemotherapy, five days every three weeks for fifteen weeks. We were eager to get on with the trip we had envisioned there. We had sat on either side of Michael’s little rolling bedside table with a Road Atlas, a National Parks guide, a guide to National Park Lodges and a book called “The Most Scenic Drives in America.” We first plotted the order in which we would visit the parks. Where they were too far apart for a day’s drive, we picked out tentative destinations that would provide for interesting waypoints. We had used a laptop to dial into the Internet and browsed links from State and Chamber of Commerce sites for interesting places to



South River Falls.

stay. The planning had been so much fun in itself, we could barely believe the trip was in progress, that we were actually in one of those “interesting places to stay.”

Miles traveled: 443
Departure datetime: Wednesday April 3, 9:30AM
Departure weather: Sunny 72°