

October 12-15, 2009 - West Virginia, Revisited

First, an explanation as to why this article is just now being published (February, 2010). It was originally written after I returned from WV, in late October. However, the photos that I incorporated into the article "by reference", rather than by copying same, became misplaced. So, when I went to submit the article to my web master, for posting as a pdf file, I discovered that none of the photos were visible, and were, I thought, lost. I have recently found that misplaced picture folder, and re-established them into the parent application, which was then reformatted to the pdf that you see here. Sorry for this mistake.

This year's trip into West Virginia was nothing like last years 3 week adventure, taken while I was working my way back home. Now that I have retired from my testing and consulting business, I am using my motor home strictly for personal travel. Thus this years 5 day mid-October sojourn into central West Virginia was more for "leaf peeping" than "money making". However, while there I did get to enjoy the fall color and brisk temperatures that Autumn in the mountains entails. The main thrust of my visit to the Mountain State was to take a ride on the Cass Scenic Railroad, located at the one time lumber mill town of the same name. Now a WV State Park, it offers several train trips of varying lengths well up into the mountains and to a 1930-40's era logging camp at Whittaker Station. There one can see the methodology used back then to take trees off the mountain, and cut them into flat-car sized lengths, for transport to the company mill located down in the valley. I chose the 2 hour train ride, since the day was cool and the passenger cars are of the open variety.

The nearest airport to the State Park belongs to the Robert C. Byrd (WV's senior Senator) National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank. This 3500 foot long paved landing strip is privately owned, and requires advance permission to land. On final, once gets a bird's eye view of the gigantic football field sized dish pointing skyward. This gigantic radio telescope is used to probe the universe for new discoveries, and is one of 6 located at this facility. A tour of the facilities is available but that is an article for another day since the facility closes down for visitation after the Labor Day weekend. Another nearby airport, located just a few miles north, is the Deer Creek Farm grass strip owned by noted adventure story author and fellow private pilot Steve Coonts, who I visited with last year.

While waiting for the noon train departure I had the opportunity to tour the old mill town facilities, with its one time hotel, and now a museum with old photos, logging equipment and other memorabilia. The original company houses have been completely restored and updated, and are now available as vacation cottage rentals. Movies showing the logging methodology used back then, as well as a preview of the upcoming current day train ride are shown at the small theater located next to the museum. I also had time to grab a light breakfast at the on-site restaurant, along with a container of hot coffee, to go.

Since my recent testing career routinely took me into operating lumber mills all over the Eastern states, I particularly enjoyed this technical aspect of the tour. However the train ride was truly enjoyable, although a bit on the cool side...especially as one begins the 3,000 foot ascent up the mountain. On the day I was there, the sky was mostly clear and the visibility unlimited. Color was approaching peak and the scenery absolutely breathtaking.



The WV mountains seem to go on forever



Wisps of smoke rise up as I near my landing strip



The Green Bank Radio Astronomy Telescope



My plane was the only one tied down that day



The Cass Railroad Station in early morning



A couple of hours later, along came our train.



Me, dressed for the cold, and our Shay locomotive



The open sided cars were filled with black smoke



What remains of the original lumber mill



The mountain scenery and color is breathtaking



Whittaker Station and its 1940's logging camp



Equipment back then was rudimentary, but worked