

Post



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Apr 24, 2024 · 5 min read

Praise the lord and pass the ketchup - April 25, 2024

SUMMARY

Drove from Asheville, North Carolina to Townsend, Tennessee across the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, a really beautiful trip. We decided not to hike to let our legs recover and because we thought (this will prove to be incorrect) we had the whole next day to do so. Got to our lodgings and enjoyed some rosé on our balcony before taking our life in our hands to run across the highway to our chosen dinner spot. - Karen

[Photos](#) | [Previous](#) | [Index](#)

DETAIL

For the second day in a row we're good and start our day with a visit to the gym. Such virtue. That's not going to last! We check out of our hotel in Asheville, get gas (which we badly need) and head towards Tennessee. Today's going to be another one of those "change cities and see a new national park along the way" day.

Running on nothing but caffeine we hold out for a few hours until we're near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It's sunny and the sky is a brilliant blue which contrasts with the drab trees. Are they all dead? As far as the eyes can see? It's not very pretty. We chide ourselves for having come to the park when apparently nothing yet is in bloom. Oh, well.

At a pullout with a picnic table we dig into our cooler for our leftover pizza and cheese and crackers. There's not much traffic but we do see a long line of motorcycles ride by. Karen counts each one as it rumbles past. Twenty something? The roads are windy and one lane in either direction. We can believe this is a much-loved destination for Harley riders.

Lunch out of the way we continue on, noting the road heading down, down, down. Our ears pop and the vegetation turns from "winter brown" to "bright spring green." Yay! Our problem wasn't time of year so much as elevation. At the Oconaluftee entrance to the National Park we stop at the visitor's center (and Karen get's another stamp for her National Park's passport).

We also tour their open air Mountain Farm Museum. They've relocated lots of common buildings that exist on most Mountain Farms in the region. They're in good repair and the National Park Service gussied them all up, real nice, so they look like the family just took off for a spell and will be right back. It was fun and educational.

We know that we are in the park but are still quite a ways from our hotel. It's in Townsend, Tennessee, so we hop back in the car and drive off. We traverse a good bit of the park from east to west, stopping at various scenic overlooks. We now know the trick about higher and lower elevations, and the associated grey/green. We get back up to altitude and it's grey/brown. We descend back down and our water bottles are sucked in and the vegetation returns to a radiant spring green.

Signs admonish us to watch out for, and to stay at least 50 yards from, bear and elk. As we drive an oncoming car flashes its lights repeatedly. I carefully double check that I don't have my high beams on as we whiz past a young elk nibbling on spring vegetation just beside the road. Much of our drive is winding back and forth following a little river named Little River. There's so much green and the bright sunlight, filtering down through the new green leaves, makes everything look green.

We check into our hotel and are told that the WiFi code is Psalms100 (uppercase P). Yep, we're in Tennessee! I'm tempted to say "Wait, Salms has a P in it?? Since when?" but I behave. We're in Townsend, a town of 650 people (up from 400 people not 15 years ago). In our dated but comfortable room is a cross and bible open to Psalms. We turn to Psalms 100 and read about singing and music. We're good with that.

We hang out on our patio, sip wine and catch up on the blog. Our room is at least 50 yards from Tennessee route 73 (AKA US 321, AKA E Lamar Alexander Parkway) which is far enough for elk or bear, but not for the traffic noise. Thankfully it's less busy later, we're told, but for now we put in our Apple AirPods and turn on noise cancellation.

Perhaps having been inspired by reading the Bible (or maybe just on our host's recommendation) we head to dinner at the Townsend Abbey across the (busy) street. It really did used to be an Abbey (at least for people who wanted to get married in an abbey near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park). As we approach we take the crowded parking lot as a bad sign. Whoops.

Thankfully there is tons of room, both inside and out. The religious part of the old abbey, with stained glass windows, high vaulted ceiling and huge cross, they converted in to a dining area by turning around every other pew and slotting a table in between. We sit outside within sight (and sound) of the Little River.

After dinner we walk to burn a few calories. There's so much grass here. Every house has an expansive lawn that goes on forever. Quite a few couples or groups are out on their front porch taking in the evening cool, and they all wave and say "Hi!". Everyone seems to have a cross, flag, and riding mower. It's a fun, relaxing place. We're relaxed, until... Whoops, we have to cross the freeway again!

Photos



Our first view of the Great Smokey Mountains National Park. No leaves on the trees. Did we come at the wrong time of year? The sign told a sad story of the white man chasing the indigenous people of this area out to Oklahoma. We're a tad depressed at this point.



But our day got sunnier thanks to left over pizza for lunch.



Some miles on we find that spring is, in fact, here. We were just fooled by the elevation!



A part of the park visitor's center is an open air museum with real buildings from various mountain farms. Very interesting! Notice the needlework project stored on the ceiling for later. No Netflix here.



Instead of a convenient Home Depot they had to forge their own tools and hinges. Sheesh.



We did see a lot of Canada Geese, but no elk. (At least not here)



Part of the Townsend Abbey. One of their many dining rooms. Notice the creative use of the old pews.



We choose to sit outside, near the Little River. The sights, sounds and food were all quite good.

[Previous](#) | [Index](#)

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