

# REPORT ON THE ABCS-SMJC BLUE-RIDGE-PARKWAY DRIVE TO PEAKS OF OTTER, 23 & 24 AUGUST 2003.

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Pics by: Penland

Delicious food for the soul, that's what it was. The drive up the Blue Ridge Parkway was awe-inspiring! Becky and I had been looking forward to this drive for a long time, as it has been several years since we've driven the whole length of the Parkway.



We got up at 5:00 AM on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> and arrived at the appointed meeting place, Sears' parking lot in Johnson City, at 6:15AM after fueling our car at a nearby Exxon station. None of the other members of our group was there yet when we arrived. We had had serious discussions about which vehicle to take on this trip. We had wanted to take our 1978 Jaguar XJ-S. But, the recent severe rise in premium-gasoline prices, the fact that rain was expected, and the fact that we had to drive over a very muddy dam that is still being reconstructed from damage resulting from the serious flood of 09 MAY 03, caused us to decide to take our 2002 Honda Civic instead. The Honda returned over 43 MPG on this drive and cost us about \$22 total for fuel. When we filled the tank upon our return home, we put in our very first over-\$20 tank of gasoline. The XJ-S would probably have cost us a hundred dollars, at least.

Within about a half-hour we had a group of several other participating cars. The first to arrive were Ferne and Hubert Bradley in their 1998 Mercedes-Benz E230 sedan. The Bradleys are the parents of Judy Penland and we were so happy and flattered that they had decided to join our club on this pleasant drive. Others who joined the group at Johnson City included J. F. Workman and Jane Ogle in Jane's 1992 Jaguar XJS; Natalie and Ben Bailey in their 1978 MGB roadster; Mickey Jilton and his friend Phyllis in their 1995 open Mercedes-Benz SL320; Judy and Eddie Penland in their 1975 MGB roadster; and Otti and Herren Floyd in their beautiful recently acquired 2002 Mazda Miata roadster.

So, we had seven cars departing Johnson City at about 7:00 AM. Ben Bailey led us through some picturesque back roads through Elizabethton, into North Carolina, then through Newland and Linville where we entered the Blue Ridge Parkway near Grandfather Mountain.

We turned north onto the Parkway and assembled at our second designated meeting place, the Linn Cove Viaduct Visitors' Center, at 8:30 AM.



We were joined there by Gail and A. W. Amanns in their beautiful 1999 Jaguar XK8 convertible and Regina and Bud Shinall, the tour leaders, in their beautifully restored 1971 MGB roadster. This brought the total number of participating cars to nine. Having determined that all who were going to join us there had arrived, we set off on the Parkway northbound. We immediately crossed the Linn Cove Viaduct, a design and engineering marvel which skirts the side of Grandfather Mountain. A short drive later, we all stopped at the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park and Manor House. Joining us there was Dave Wallace in his open 1996 Mazda Miata, bringing the total of participating cars to ten. This Manor House is a really beautiful example of the intricate style of architecture in favor at the time it was built. Our group made many photographs and purchased souvenirs at the Parkway Craft Center at this location.



Continuing northbound on the Parkway, enjoying the breathtaking far-distant vistas along each side of the Southern Appalachians, and the beautiful, lush, trees and plant life close to the roadway, with occasional rest stops along the way, we arrived at the Mabry Mill, near the Meadows of Dan, 133 miles from where we entered the Parkway, at 1:45 PM. This Mill is still in its old original condition and is in a very picturesque setting along a stream. The Mill was built and operated by E. B. Mabry from 1910 until 1935. Trails lead to his gristmill (where we witnessed a demonstration of corn actually being ground by very large millstones), sawmill, blacksmith shop, and other exhibits including demonstrations of old-time skills. Because of the very interesting nature of the Mill and its picturesque surroundings, our group spent a long time enjoying and photographing it even though the weather was overcast.





After spending a couple of enjoyable hours at the Mill, we continued northbound along the Parkway. It seems that private homes, farms, and unsightly subdivisions, even other highways, have seriously encroached on the Parkway since our last visit. In some cases private farmland and structures were encroaching as close as ten or fifteen feet to the pavement. It seems to us that a much wider buffer zone along the Parkway would have been advisable, say, a mile on either side of the roadway, during its construction so that all these ugly signs of civilization would not have been visible when driving along this idyllic pathway.

Ninety-five miles north of the Mill, we finally arrived at the Peaks of Otter Lodge, exactly 300 miles from home, at almost 5:00 PM. The Lodge consists of several very large wooden buildings sprawling at the shore of small but picturesque Abbott Lake. There was a short period of relaxation following our check-in and room assignment. We then met as a group in the dining room at the Lodge at 6:30 PM for a lovely dinner and fellowship. The Lodge rooms have no television or telephones. We noticed that there was a lecture about bears at the amphitheater at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center at 8:00 PM. So Becky and I decided to attend rather than sit in our room all evening and stare at the walls. We walked the 500 yards around the corner to the Visitor Center. On the way, we came very close to several buck deer with beautiful racks of antlers. It was surprising to us how close they would allow us to approach without running away. They just calmly grazed while we approached to within about ten feet of them. It was quite a thrill for us to see these beautiful animals.

The talk at the amphitheater, given by a lady park ranger was very fascinating and we learned a lot of facts about bears that we'd never known before. The walk back to the lodge afterward in almost total darkness was somewhat harrowing. We'd assumed that there would not be any traffic along the road at night, but every minute or so a car would come along and blind us with its lights. We were glad to finally get back to the safety of our very nice room.

On Sunday morning, the group met again in the dining room of the Lodge for a scrumptious breakfast and more good fellowship. After checking out of our rooms, some of the group elected to travel back home by a more direct route. But, six couples in their respective cars, the Shinalls, Penlands, Bradleys, Baileys, Floyds, and Mitchells, after appropriate refueling at the filling station at the Visitor Center, headed south again on the beautiful Parkway and drove the 95 miles back down to the Mabry Mill. Even though we'd visited it just the day before, on Sunday it was sunnier with occasional clouds and this probably made for better photography. We participated in a very interesting guided tour conducted by a gentleman park ranger who used to train airline pilots, which gave us more insight into the Mill and all the activities associated with it when it was active. Upon leaving the Mill, most of us chose our own route home.

We chose to travel through Galax and Independence where we found “Ciro’s” a very good pizza and sub restaurant we remembered from a previous visit. We had a good supper there and then continued on through Mouth of Wilson, then south on I-81 and arrived home to Kingsport at 6:10 PM, having traveled a total of 562 miles round trip. After refueling at Johnson City, our little Honda Civic made the entire trip without needing any additional fuel. The weekend of beautiful soul-enriching scenery and wildlife viewing (the Shinalls reported having seen a bear on the road), good fellowship and good food was very much enjoyed by all participants. Those of you who did not come with us missed a very good time.



Editors note: Special thanks to Bud and Regina for their effort in making our overnight trip such a great success.