

June 2008: Family Vacation - South and Midwest

5. Alabama & Kentucky

Friday June 27: Huntsville: I have wanted to show my family this beautiful city that I have visited so often and come to admire. However, today starts out unfortunate. First, Jerri's tooth crown has come loose, and rather than risk getting stuff under it and decaying the post, we find a dentist in town who can fix it. So there's about an hour lost. Then, we *have* to do laundry, so after breakfast (which Jerri can now eat), we find a laundromat and wash. This takes another hour and a half. Most of the morning is now gone.

Third Disaster

While Jerri and the girls were at the laundromat, I went to the Huntsville-Madison Public Library to try to upload the camera contents to my server. I got time as a guest on their Internet access computers, and looked at the rules. Wow, you can't do hardly anything but Web-cruise. But I bend the rules just a bit, and connect the three cameras to the USB port and dial up the server, which has a Web utility for file management. I upload my pictures, and then delete them from the camera. I upload Faith's pictures, and then delete them from the camera. I upload Mom's pictures, and while I'm fixing to delete them from the camera, I notice that the folders where I supposedly uploaded my pictures was empty. Upon closer look, the Web file manager had a "Verify Files" button and a separate "Upload" button. I had "Verified" those files, but I hadn't actually "Uploaded" them. Aaughh! I upload Mom's pictures. The others are lost. This is why we don't have hardly any pictures from Savannah to Huntsville - most of the visuals on the last couple of pages are pictures "stolen" (advertising...) from those attractions on the Web.



On to the sights. First, we drive by a few of the churches I've visited (West Huntsville and First Baptist). Then we go by Maple Hill Cemetary (by accident more than intent) and look at the Confederate graves. Then we drove through Twickenham and looked at some of the big old houses. Then we parked near downtown, walked in, and visited the Weeden

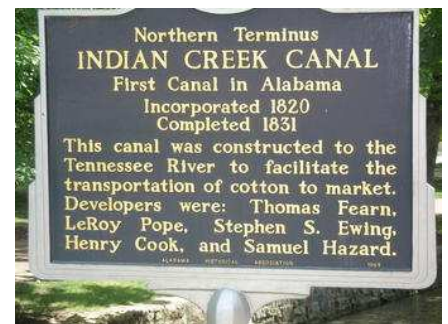
House here (which was closed, in spite of the sign saying it was open) and Harrison Brothers. Then we went down the stairs to the Big Spring Park. I love this downtown area!

Big Spring in June. Girls are looking at the koi.



Indian Creek Canal, with weird ducks/geese. Actually, I wasn't here to see this. Realizing the day was growing old, I left to fetch the car and meet them at the end of the park (rather than have them climb the stairs and walk back with me). I want to get to the Space Center!

I still think having a name like "Hazard" is cool!



So I pick them up and we leave for the Space Center. We arrive at 4:00 - and discover that it closes at 5:00! They let people in free after 4:00, not a good deal for me; I wanted to see the museum. Also, since we haven't had anything since our late breakfast, the first thing we do is head for the Cafe, and go through just before they close. It is now 4:30, and we poke through the smaller part of the museum (the early years, the Von Braun years, up through Space Station), walk through the big part (with the lunar lander and the V2 and the Gemini capsule), and... that's all. They are closing. Well, the museum is closing, and I got tickets to the IMAX. We go into the theatre and sit down for what I was sure would be a

spacey documentary-type film. With growing surprise, we discover that this is not a cartoony advertisement or preview, it is... the feature film... "Kung Fu Panda"! We were all quite amused, but watched it anyways. It was good - in a stupid Disney sort of "good".



Faith in the Space Station EVA chair, wiggling out.



Charity in the EVA chair, thinking deep thoughts. Hope she doesn't hurt herself.

Well, I'm disappointed. Huntsville has been kind of a loss for us. But there's no fixing it now (maybe we will come back some other time, maybe in Spring). Right now, it's on to Decatur - and Big Bob Gibson's!



As long as the TOW people have been coming to Huntsville, Greenbriers was the representative barbecue restaurant, the scene of victory celebrations. A few years back, I discovered Big Bobs. It's better. Jerri and Charity get potatoes, I get ribs. Faith got a turkey sandwich. It was really good, like usual!

Sorry, Greenbriers, but you've been outclassed. But not forgotten; your own excellent food and rural charm assures your place in my stom... ah, heart.



It's late now. We leave Decatur in the dark, cross the Tennessee for the last time over the Steamboat Bill Memorial Bridge, strike the freeway to Nashville, and after a few hours and only one mixup in Nashville's confusing freeway system, get to our hotel.

Back to Tennessee: See Part 4

Sunday June 29: Mammoth Cave: We had to leave Nashville fairly early, because it's an hour and a half drive to Mammoth Cave, where we have a 10:30 tour.

Mammoth Cave is a National Park (Golden Eagle ready!) containing the (allegedly) longest cave system in the United States. I thought I heard the same story over at Windy Cave in the Black Hills, but whatever. There are several entrances in this rather large park, and we can't see more than one, so we picked the "Historical" entrance. The tour has a funny rule about *absolutely no* cases or bags. I had to carry my camera. Jerri had to leave her waterbottle in the car. Weird.



There were scads of people; I can see why we had to make a tour reservation. But there are scads of people at Carlsbad; it's just a different tour arrangement there. I suppose Mammoth is to the Southeast as Carlsbad is to the Southwest.



The historical entrance is the one that looks like a cave. Mammoth's entrance isn't as wide as Carlsbad, but it goes a lot farther. Really, the cave looks like an underground river channel or a huge train tunnel - the cross section is very elliptical, the ceiling is *very* high. And like Ruby Falls, there are no side passages or speliothems. Part of the

deal is the unusual geology - a shale layer above the limestone slows the percolation of water.

To my mind, there were two really interesting things about this "mammoth" cave. First, this was a saltpetre mine in the early 1800s, and their method was to run water into the cave and over the ore collected in stone tanks, and then pump the water out for evaporation. The pipes were hollowed logs - many of which were still along the path! Second, we descended into the cave (through a side passage) to the lowest depth at the foot of an amazing shaft (or "pit" (down) and "dome" (up), in cave-speak). There was water falling down this shaft - not as much as Ruby Falls, but enough to make you aware of the vertical height. But in the end, the most impressive thing about it was the size of the main gallery.

Lincoln Birthplace: Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky, moved to Indiana, and lived in Illinois where he did his law and political work. The atlas showed the red dot marked "Lincoln Birthplace", so we stopped. Yep, another National Park (out come the Golden Eagle and the Passport Book). The little museum is very small, doesn't take long, has a pretty good interpretive film, and... Lincoln Logs for the kids. Interesting Note For Zonies: Frank Lloyd Wright was a famous architect who did a lot of work in Arizona (like the Gammage Theatre and the Biltmore Hotel and Taliesin West and such). His son, John Lloyd Wright, was also an architect... and a toymaker, for it was *he* who invented Lincoln Logs!



After the film, we go outside and look at this marvel. Interesting thing: Not long after Lincoln's death, someone obtained a log cabin that "most people" believed was his birth home. They took it apart and moved it around the country, charging admission for people to see it. Sounds like the Cyclorama? Eventually, some influential Lincoln fans bought the cabin, and built this marble shrine.

So you climb these granite stairs to the temple-like structure with the immortal

words "With Malice Towards None, With Charity Towards All", and inside... is a log cabin. Which *might* be the actual Lincoln birth home.

Somewhat more interesting to Zonies was the spring, which is both the *raison d'etre* and the namesake for Sinking Spring Farm. At the foot of the hill where the monument stands (and presumably where the original house stood) is a little brick-lined depression with this dribbling spring.



Well, it seems that Thomas Lincoln, Abe's dad, wasn't too good about his real estate dealings, or was too much a drifter to care, so his title to the farm was challenged (a common thing in the days before regular surveying and recording), he lost, and was evicted.



He moved a few miles to the east and settled at Knob Creek. Abraham grew to about seven years old here, and went to school with his sister. His little brother, Thomas, died in infancy and was buried here.

Driving from the Birth Home to the Boyhood home is all on rural highways. At one point we get behind an Amish family (mom, sister, brother) in a buggy. The little boy kept turning around to look at us, holding his straw hat to his head. The horse must have been used to cars, as it didn't even flinch when we finally got to pass them.

Unlike the birth home, which *might* be the actual log cabin, which "most people" think was authentic, this cabin is known not to be. It was constructed from materials taken from the cabin of his boyhood friend who lived nearby. But I guess you can't have a National Park where Lincoln lived and not have a log cabin to put on it. So here it is.



Louisville:



We leave the countryside around Elizabethtown and drive north for about an hour, and enter Louisville. Our only real visit in this city is the racetrack. Once again, we get there too late to see the little Derby Museum (just off the left side of this picture).

The track was closed of course, and the gates locked, but Jerri got this picture of an iconic iron jockey inside. When we left here and drove around the place, on the south side of the complex we saw the fancy stables for the racehorses.



It's a big place. In a bad neighborhood. When the rich folk come to pay for their seats in the stands on Racing Day, they go through blocks of shabby houses, liquor stores, and porn shops. I don't know that Churchill Downs and horserace gambling has anything to do with it, but the causal effect has been noted in Atlantic City and other places with institutionalized gambling. Our hotel is southwest of the Downs in a quieter and more commercialized location.

Now, when we leave tomorrow morning, we take the beltway north along the

river front. It looks like it has a nice downtown area (as much as driving by on the freeway can tell you), and we saw the Louisville Slugger Field, where, had we the time and interest for a visit, we could have gotten little Louisville Slugger bats made and personalized for us!

On to the Creation Museum: See Part 6