

October 2-9, 2016 Campout at Battlefield Campground, Ringgold GA (near Chattanooga, TN)

By Cheryl Love

Eight members attended some or all of the October campout: Barbara Overby and Cheryl Love (hosts), Edith Skinner, John Henry Markham, Rod Jackson, Dorothy Spang, Sam Corallo, and Dale Baer (who joined at the campout).

On Monday we five women went to the Chattanooga Visitors Center, which was really a Visitors Desk in a walkway between downtown buildings. The two men manning the desk were friendly and helpful. We walked to the Aquarium where Cheryl and Dale bought combo tickets (Aquarium, IMAX, and River Gorge Explorer) for the next day. We had an enjoyable lunch at Puckett's Grocery and Restaurant (founded in the 50s). The double-decker bus tour of the city runs only on weekends, so we rode the free city shuttle to the Chattanooga Duck Boats (World War II amphibians). Our tour guide told us the history of the duck boats on the way to the riverfront, then told us some of Chattanooga's history as we toured the riverfront on the water.

Some interesting facts about Chattanooga are: in 1899 two young attorneys from Chattanooga bought the exclusive rights to bottle Coca Cola for \$1, because Coca Cola's owner didn't think they would make any money from bottling the product. In March 1867 Chattanooga experienced a record flood. The river rose 53 feet, which was 15.5 feet higher than a flood twenty years earlier. The water level in the Tennessee River rose 28 feet above flood range. The bridge across the river was destroyed, as were many buildings. There was a considerable loss of life and looting took place. During a 64-year span ranging from 1875 to 1938, the Tennessee River rose above its flood range more than 70 times. Therefore, around 40 blocks of downtown Chattanooga were raised by 3 to 15 feet.

On Tuesday, Cheryl and Dale used their combo tickets to visit the Tennessee Aquarium, view the IMAX film (Jean-Michel Cousteau's Secret Ocean 3D), and rode the River Gorge Explorer (a high-speed catamaran). The ride is so smooth and while sitting inside, it doesn't feel like it's going 50 mph, it's top speed. When it reached the gorge, it slowed so everyone could go out on the deck for views and photos. Others in our group chose to go to the Ringgold, GA Visitors Center, downtown Ringgold, and the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park (which preserves the sites of two major battles of the American Civil War: the Battle of Chickamauga and the Chattanooga Campaign).

On Wednesday, Dale chose to stay in the campground to pack because she planned to leave the next day for family reasons. John Henry was shopping for, and working on, his new (to him) motor home. Rod and Sam did some shopping. Dorothy, Barbara, Edith, and Cheryl went to Rock City on top of Lookout Mountain. Rock City has over 400 native species of plants and trees, many ancient rock formations, sculpture art installations, a 180-foot swinging bridge, and spectacular views of the Tennessee Valley. Named one of "America's Iconic Places" and one of the places to "see before you die." That evening, we had our pot luck dinner, with plenty of good food for all.

On Thursday, Dale left for home after coffee. Six of us rode the Incline Railway up Lookout Mountain (John Henry had ridden it previously) and walked to Point Park at the top. The Incline Railway is the world's steepest passenger railway, 72.7% near the top, and touted as "America's Most Amazing Mile.". Point Park was the site of the "Battle Above the Clouds" in 1863. On the way back to the campground, some of us stopped at the Georgia winery for a free wine tasting.

On Friday, six of us went to Ruby Falls (John Henry had also seen it previously). Ruby Falls is America's tallest and deepest underground waterfall open to the public. You descend 260 feet by elevator, and a

total of 1,120 feet underground to view many unique geological formations before arriving at the falls. That evening, Barbara cooked hot dogs and had all the extra fixins' for us. Thanks, Barbara.

On Saturday, most stayed in the campground to pack for leaving the next day, but Cheryl and Rod made one more trip to Chattanooga. They rode the free shuttle to the North Shore, had lunch at the Beast and Barrel, walked to Coolidge park where Cheryl rode the carousel, walked across the Walnut Street Bridge (world's longest pedestrian bridge), and went to the Hunter Art Museum. That evening, most enjoyed dinner at a restaurant recommended by the campground, while Rod and Cheryl had wine and barbecue at the Georgia Winery Harvest Fest.

On Sunday, we went our separate ways. Unfortunately, John Henry had a Daryl-Sponseller-type run-in with a tree on his way out of the campground. Despite breaking off the front awning arm, he was able to drive home without further incident. It was windy driving home because of Hurricane Matthew, but we all made it safely without any blocked or flooded roads.