

Travel Time WITH CHASE & BUD

TRAVEL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

All travel decisions in the time of COVID-19 require extra thought and planning. This was certainly true of our road trip from New Hampshire to Florida in early October. When we drove home from Cape Coral to Bow back in late May, the virus was in its earlier stages and we decided to try and outrun it. A surgical two 750-mile days on the road with one overnight in North Carolina. We arrived very tired, but safe and healthy, as our negative COVID tests verified the week after we got home.

Should we do the same to get back to Florida? We'd enjoyed a socially distanced NH summer in a carefully constructed bubble of family and a few trusted friends. But after watching surges throughout the summer we decided to rethink our approach.

First, we thought about our own health. Now that we are (shockingly) in our mid-70's, driving two consecutive 750-mile days is draining. We knew we were healthy, per negative September COVID tests, and wanted to stay that way. We decided not to rush.

Next, we looked at Georgia Tech's COVID risk assessment tool (<https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>) to analyze route options. We'd always favored the "straight down I 95" drive. Speedy and familiar, but also hard to avoid the population centers. Georgia Tech's user-friendly, color coded risk tool showed much lower probabilities of encountering someone with the virus if we chose a more rural route.

We were making progress! Take longer, go rural. Planning a road trip like this is Bud's forte. He hauled out old AAA maps, powered up his laptop, found our hotel rewards cards and got to work. As he pondered the possibilities, he would ask about this area in Virginia or that area in Tennessee or South Carolina. I would check the risk tool and say good—or keep looking.

The research brought Bud back to a some Bucket List items: Virginia's Skyline Drive, a 105-mile scenic drive along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Shenandoah National Park; and the Blue Ridge Parkway, a linear National Park that continues along the

Blue Ridge Mountains for another 493 miles.

That did it. We found dog-friendly hotels in Front Royal, VA at the northern entrance to Skyline Drive, in Kingsport, TN a ways down the Blue Ridge Parkway, and near Savannah, GA, where we would duck back onto I 95.

The last question was the weather. No way to schedule sunny skies! Traveling in early October would likely eliminate snow and sleet issues, but Skyline Drive is known for fog and rain which can be extremely dangerous and even mean road closure—the same for the Blue Ridge Parkway. How to deal with that? Flexibility. Our timeline was open-ended, and our hotels were La Quinta and Wyndham, booked directly so we could make changes up to 4pm the day of arrival. If the weather didn't cooperate, we could adjust our itinerary to take longer—or go faster.

How did it go? On a scale of 1 to 10, ten being fabulous, we'd both give it a 14 or 15. The weather was beyond perfect for every inch of our Blue Ridge Mountain adventure. The vistas along Skyline Drive were dramatic and yes... blue-ish. The skies were sunny, the temps crisp and cool. Both drives had some traffic, but nothing bothersome. Turnoffs abounded so we could stop



Mount Mitchell on the Blue Ridge Parkway in NC stands at 6,684' and is the tallest mountain east of the Mississippi. Yup, New Hampshireers, our Mount Washington stands at 6,289', losing out by a mere 395'! Mount Mitchell is named for Rev. Elisha Mitchell, a scientific explorer who died on the mountain in 1857 trying to prove its exact height. The Civilian Conservation Corps' stonework is still gorgeous and functional 90 years later.

and admire nature. Steep drop-offs kicked the excitement level up several notches—and I will note that Skyline Drive has many more guard rails than the Blue Ridge Parkway.

We were able to use our National Park Senior Lifetime Pass (<https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/pass-es.htm>), which we bought about eight years ago for \$10. It allows cars with up to 4 people free admission to all National parks for your lifetime. The price has gone up to \$80 for a lifetime pass, but \$20 will get you an annual pass.

Bud is a mountain scenery buff, and I am a history buff, so I was thrilled to find info on the history of the roads' construction. It was all done through the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps that President Franklin Roosevelt created via executive order in 1933 to combat the massive unemployment of the Great Depression. Visit www.nps.gov and Google CCC for stunning images, planning info and the fascinating

history of how some of our most beautiful and enduring roads, bridges and buildings were built by young American men desperate for work.

We arrived in Cape Coral right on time—nary a drop of rain the whole four days. After a week we took advantage of the free COVID testing at CVS and once more tested negative. Success!



The weather was so perfect we had to linger atop Mount Mitchell. The view west is clear evidence that the Blue Ridge Mountains are perfectly named.



Linn Cove Viaduct is a 1,243-foot concrete segmental bridge which connects the Blue Ridge Parkway around Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina.

Travel Talk has a new name and a new look! We'll always include an image from our current or past travels.

It can be a bit of nostalgia for the world of travel as it used to be, but also perhaps inspiration for the world of travel as it evolves.

Next month: Where in the world can Americans go and how hard is it to get there?