



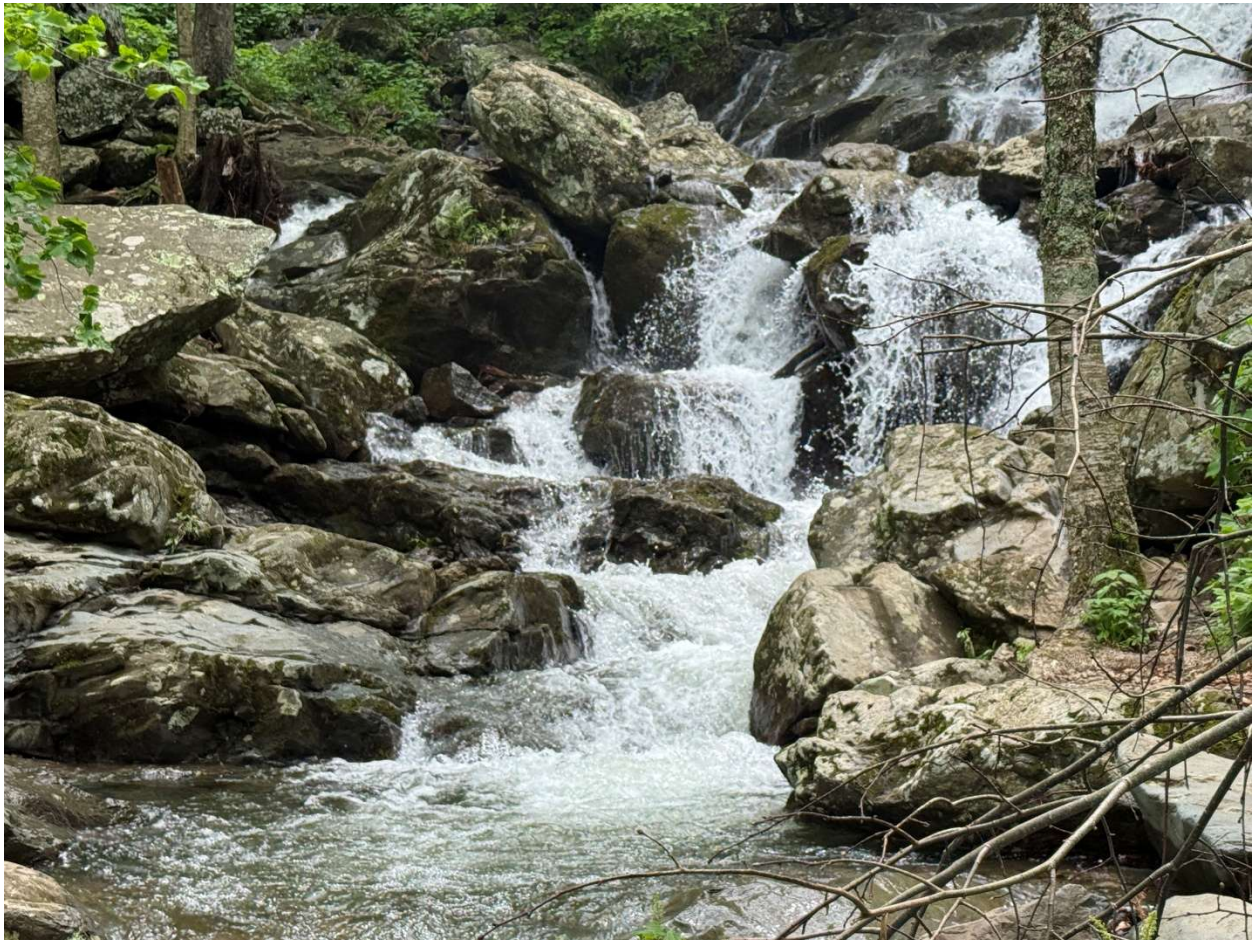
The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

# RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2025.05.15-17  
WV and VA Waterfalls



There had to some positives to all this rain.

Good for the crops? Bah, I ain't got no damn crops. But I don't begrudge you the rain if you have some thirsty plants (or animals).

Wash the road grime off the van? OK, yeah, the heavy stuff might get splashed off, but it's not like getting a good car wash. Besides, the spray from the vehicles in front me as they drive along the wet road after the rain has stopped, well, that just makes Maxx dirtier than before. A heavy rain, though, *does* help the wipers clean the bird turds and splatted bug guts off the windshield. A typical windshield wash cycle does **not** get that job done.

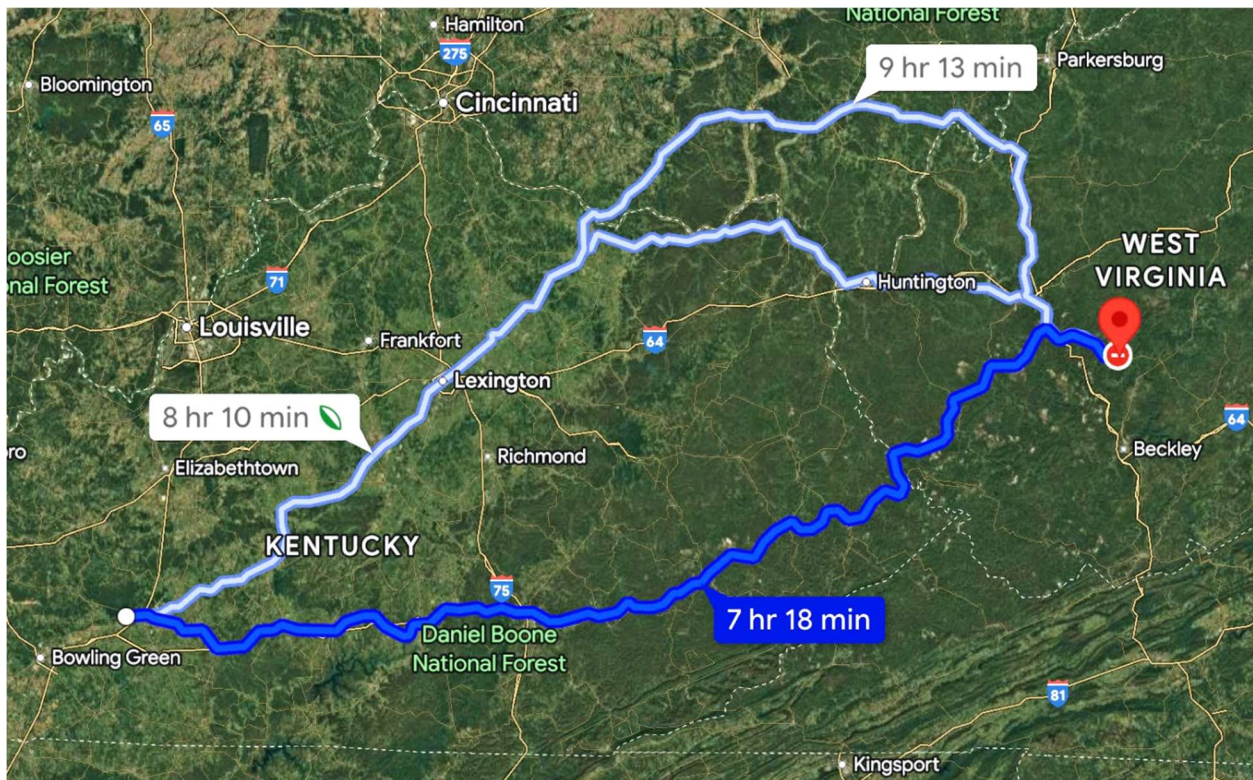


But wait a tick, the rain flows into the rivers, and the rivers go over waterfalls. Those things ought to be *gushing!*

I was angling towards central West Virginia – which is not the same as central - west Virginia – where I had fallen in like last year with Cathedral Falls, near the town of Gauley Bridge. I liked it so much, in fact, that after Little Bird captured his pics and vids, I headed back to where I had come from, totally forgetting that there were **two** waterfalls in that area that I wanted to check out.

The second of the two – Kanawha Falls -- was on my docket for today. The rain was currently taking a much-needed rest, but I was confident that the Kanawha River would be rocking. I could hear Little Bird chirping with excitement in his cage.

The catch to all that, though, is that it was almost a 400-mile drive from MCNP to my coveted falls. My 50 MPH budget put that at eight hours. BUT, as I'm sure you were about to remind me, I would have to give back that hour that I borrowed from Central Time when I would cross back into the ETZ. That made it a nine-hour trek.



GooGirl called it 7:18, but GooGirl never rests. She drives, drives, drives at the limit of legal speed, without ever stopping for gas, or taking a snack break, or pausing to snap a few photos of cool stuff, or answering Nature's call. Nature doesn't call GooGirl.

But Blue Maxx and I do *all* of the above. After all, the ride is half the fun, sometimes more. As the wise man said, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”

I figured I’d reach my goal close to supper time. I just hoped that it would not be raining when I got there. The radar looked iffy.

The ride went well. There was some rain, but it was light and not troublesome. The route followed highways, but they were the second-tier roads, not the prime I-ways that would’ve been loaded with trucks. The final few dozen miles were on US-60, winding its way along the northern bank of the mighty Kanawha until we reached – and almost missed – the sudden turnout for the Kanawha Falls Public Fishing Area.



The photo above was my first impression, and I was unimpressed by it. The falls seemed small, inconsequential, and far away. In a ground level photo, this waterfall was a total yawner.

BUT, this is why I love my drones. Little Bird could not wait to reconnoiter from on high. I launched him forward from under the trees, he skimmed along about 6 feet above the water for a while, then slowly rose higher and higher as he approached the falls. I checked his screen frequently, astounded by what he was capturing.

The river was wide, and there was an old brick building that has served as a Electric Generating Plant since 1920. The Upper Kanawha sits 24 feet higher than the Lower, though it looked like much less from my vantage point. A concrete overflow dam stretched from bank to bank. Along the rim, there is 880 yards (1/2 mile) of dam, though





the point-to-point distance is 660 yards. The width of the Kanawha is just 450 yards at this bend, but the orientation of the sandstone shelf required a diagonal dam.

Most it was a straight line, but the builders needed to create a kind of alcove, almost like a three-sided, open-ended rhombus (if there was such a thing, which there





isn't, since a rhombus is, by definition, a four-sided polygon, but you knew that) before curving off to the eastern bank.



The upriver water was smooth as a glass tabletop, then along the dam lines the flow plunged several feet over a series of flat rock shelves, creating frothy gushes of white water that were tugged quickly downstream.

But the vortex of the convergence point was the most hypnotic. The river rushed inward from all sides, mixing furiously, creating a maelstrom of brown water and white, churning foam.

The video of it is dramatic (especially when scored with appropriate music). (View it on my [YouTube channel](#).)

Here are some more interesting Kanawha Falls facts for ya, since I know you crave them:

For a million years, these falls have served as a barrier to fish. The species downriver are quite different than the ones above the falls. In fact, many of the upper



river species are found nowhere else in the world! That's a phrase you usually hear in connection with Madagascar or New Zealand or Easter Island, or some other remote location. I did not expect to learn that about West Virginian fish.

The Kanawha is formed at the confluence of the Gauley River and the New River, only a mile to the north. The New River – which *might* actually be named after a man named New, by the way – runs through New River Gorge National Park, a focal point for water-related recreation.

From the falls, the Kanawha winds a meandering course northwest to merge with the Ohio River and flow through Cincinnati.

Of course, the falls also separates boat traffic. The primary use of the Upper K is recreational: kayaking, canoeing, white-water rafting, and, of course, fishing. On the Lower K, boating is more industrial in nature: barge navigation and such, leading to the Ohio River and beyond.



The Electric Generating Station, now more than a century old, received a rehabilitation that lasted from 2010 to 2012, with the station being restored to full operation, to feed the nearby small, but very cool and colorful community of Glen Ferris, where the famous Glen Ferris Inn (built in 1810) can be found. Several Confederate and Union generals both stayed at this inn during the Civil War, though, I assume, not at the same time.

The town was actually built up by Union Carbide, which, in 1930, opened a plant downriver and constructed homes here to house some of their 2800 workers. They also built a school, church, post office, recreation hall and more.

It sounds all happy and successsy, but UC screwed up bigtime. Trying to get increased water flow, they cut a 3-mile tunnel through the mountain near a spot called Hawks Nest, not realizing that the rock was 98% pure silica and caused acute silica poisoning in hundreds of the workers, and killed many of them.









With ample daylight remaining, I decided to revisit Cathedral Falls. It was just 3.2 miles away, it lay right on my planned route, and I really liked it last year, so it was a no-brainer, which is perfect for me.

A black SUV that had pulled out of Kanawha's parking area just ahead of me pulled into Cathedral's parking area just ahead of me. Hmmmm, someone following me from the front?

I de-vanned before they de-SUVed and staked my claim to the unoccupied falls basin. With no ground-level people to worry about, I could fly LB slowly up and down the multiple layers of tumbling water and ragged shelves of dark rock.

Unlike last year's early afternoon visit, the falls were all in supertime shadow behind the tall, hillside trees. I was surprised to find that I liked it better this way. The outer edge greens were not as brilliant, but the interior shadows did not hide as much either. The whole hillside looked deeply green and healthy, and the whiteness of the falling water was not as glaring as it had been in bright sunlight.

I probably spent about 15 minutes collecting stills and vids.

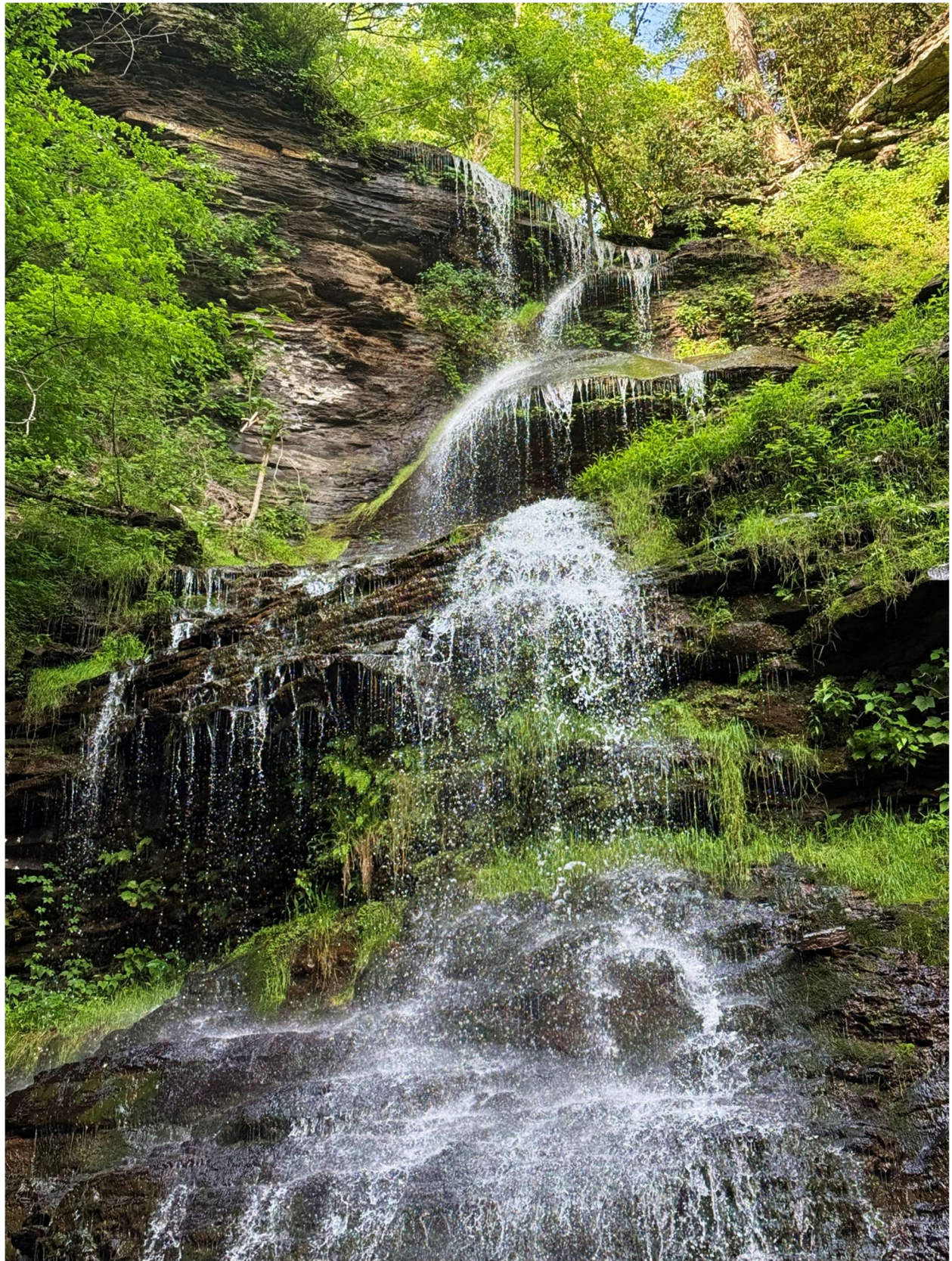








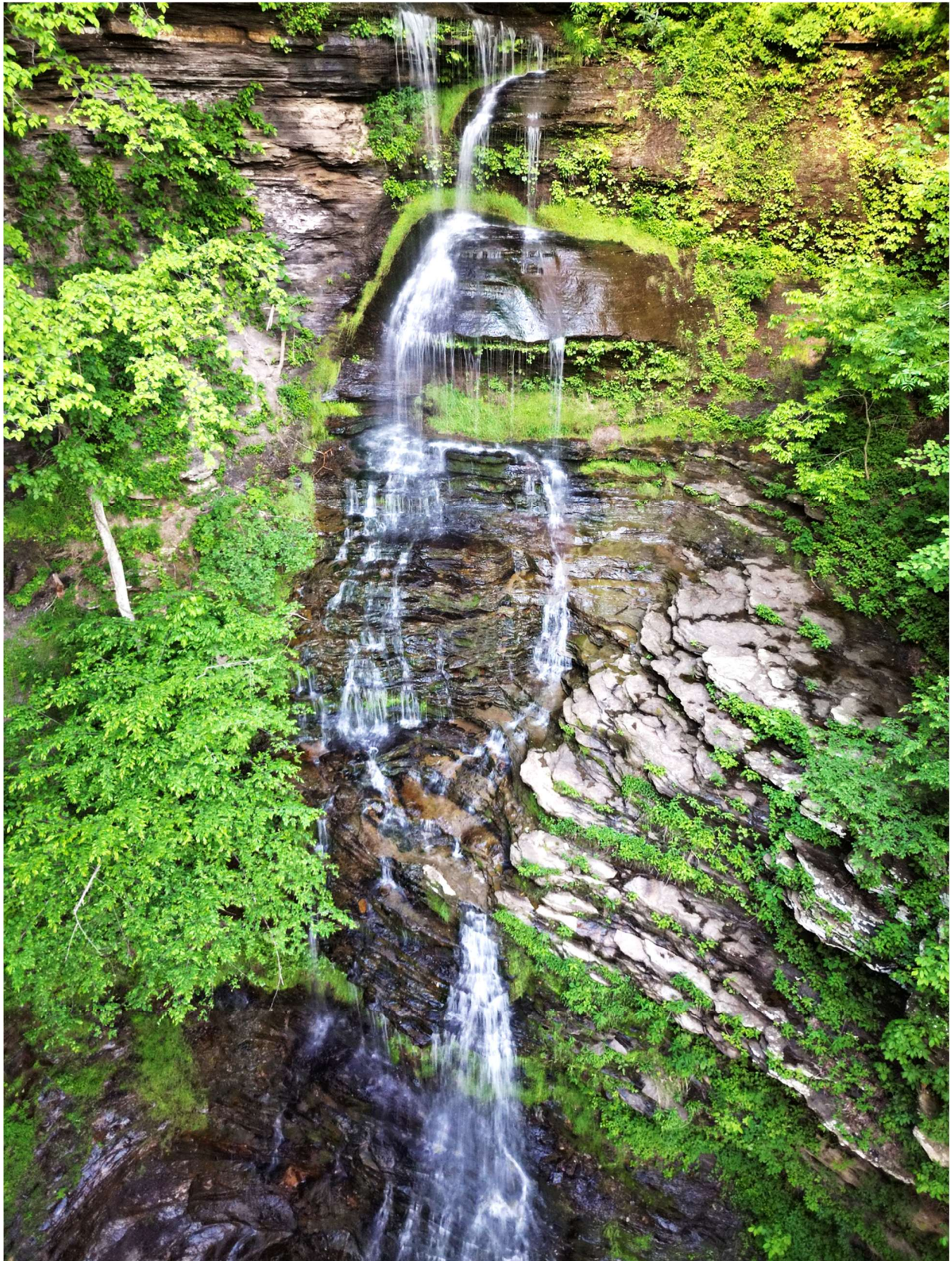














When I walked back towards Maxx, a daunting looking woman with cropped, punkish hair and covered with tattoos and piercings, and two pre-school age girls in their colorful little dresses were placidly playing in the small stream that ran off from the basin. The mom very politely said that she had not wanted to disturb me, so she had kept her kids away till I was done.

One of the girls rudely sneered out, “Why do you have a *drrrrone??*” Little bitch.

So, the nasty-looking woman was nice, and nice-looking girl was nasty. Just goes to show: Don’t judge by appearances.

The CF video of CF is radically different than the KF video, which figures since the two waterfalls are about as different as you could be: Kanawha being wide and low and powerful, and Cathedral being tall and slim and ethereal. But, set to relaxing music, the Cathedral Falls video is one of my favorites. (View it on my [YouTube channel](#).)

It was a 40-minute drive from here to my Site For The Nite. Yes, you surmised correctly: another brewpub. This one was chosen – just as craft brews themselves often are – largely by its name: The Gad Dam Brewery. As soon as I saw that on the Harvest Hosts map, I knew I had to check it out. Even if they had not had a spot available, I think I still would have gone there just to wallow in the vibe.



The big, old, wooden building, with the stone chimney, and the large unrefined back yard won me over right away.

It was on a ridiculous slope, though, so I had my doubts at first about sleeping here. Turns out there was one very level spot







reserved for HH guest – even set off by cones and a markerboard sign – that was perfect.



Inside, the bar and room were classic. Sonesta (my barkeep), John (the owner), and Cameron (John's son), in the above photo, were very welcoming and free with conversation.

I commented on how the name brought me here, and I was told that it had been a controversial decision that had met with some disapproval.

The justification, though, was that, in the 1960's, Summersville Lake was created by the building of a dam, in order to control flooding in the watershed of the Gauley and Kanawha Rivers. It is a reservoir, and, with 60 miles of coastline and a max depth of 327 feet (100 meters), it is the largest lake in West Virginia.





So what? Well, it is kinda near the town of Summersville, but it was closer to the town of Gad. Uh-huh. Could they possibly call it the Gad Dam? Really?

The decision was made to avoid the potential firestorm that would bring and name it for the town further away.

A brewery, however, would surely face much less blowback from the region's fussy prudes, and might even attract the patronage of those who saw the humor in the name, and even viewed it as a positive. You know, people like me, for example.



The Big Timber IPA was excellent. Both of them. GDB does not offer much food, but when I saw "Chicken, Bacon, Ranch Flatbread," I did not need to look further. And it was yum.

There was an art class here when I arrived, explaining why the parking lot was filled to overflowing. It was odd, but it added a cool vibe to an already cool place.





Once again, I was the last to leave. I have not lost my talent for closing bars, but, let's face it, it's pretty easy when they close at 9:00. And I just sauntered off a couple hundred feet to my bedroom on wheels, and had the whole quiet property to myself, even when I packed up and departed at 10:15 AM.

Oh yes, I forgot to mention that they let me put one of my stickers high up on the wall behind the bar. Love it.



[BLOG POST: 2025.05.16](#)  
[Waterfall Closed](#)

This could have been a separate post, but you probably would've groaned "more freaking waterfalls??" and skipped it. It's quite short, too, so it works better as an addendum. Plus, I already named this post "WV and VA Waterfalls", so what do you expect me to do? Rename it? Who has time for *that*?

Shenandoah National Park is involved – specifically Skyline Drive – and more specifically the Dark Hollow Falls Trail.



I'd been here before, hiked this trail, and got some fairly nice photos. There was room for improvement, though, and since I was "in the area", I figured that a ride through Skyline Drive – especially for no charge – was never a bad thing anyway.

So, 214 miles after leaving my accommodation at the Gad Dam Brewery, I pulled up to the Shenandoah NPS Swift Run Gap Entrance Station and wielded my card. The attendant nodded appreciatively, as they always do, and asked if I needed a trail map, apologizing for not having any of the popular, black-barred, full-park brochure maps.

"No," I replied, "I'm just heading up to Dark Hollow Falls. This rain must have those falls really gushing."

"Oh...", he said, "that trail is closed today. Too much rain lately."

What??? Dammmmn, this was a pretty significant detour – from where I was, not many people head due east to VA in order to go due north to western PA -- made solely for this trail. He sympathized and suggested an alternative.

With enthusiasm dimmed – to match the gray, drizzly day – I proceeded in that direction anyway. Instead of driving right by, though, I pulled into the parking lot for DHF.

There was a white plastic sawhorse at the top of the trail. A piece of paper was taped to it. Two people were coming up out of trail, just walking around it. Hmmm.

"Is the trail washed out?" I asked the woman.

"No, not at all," she replied, clearly sensing my ambivalence about the situation. "It's a little muddy, but not bad at all. And the falls are great!"



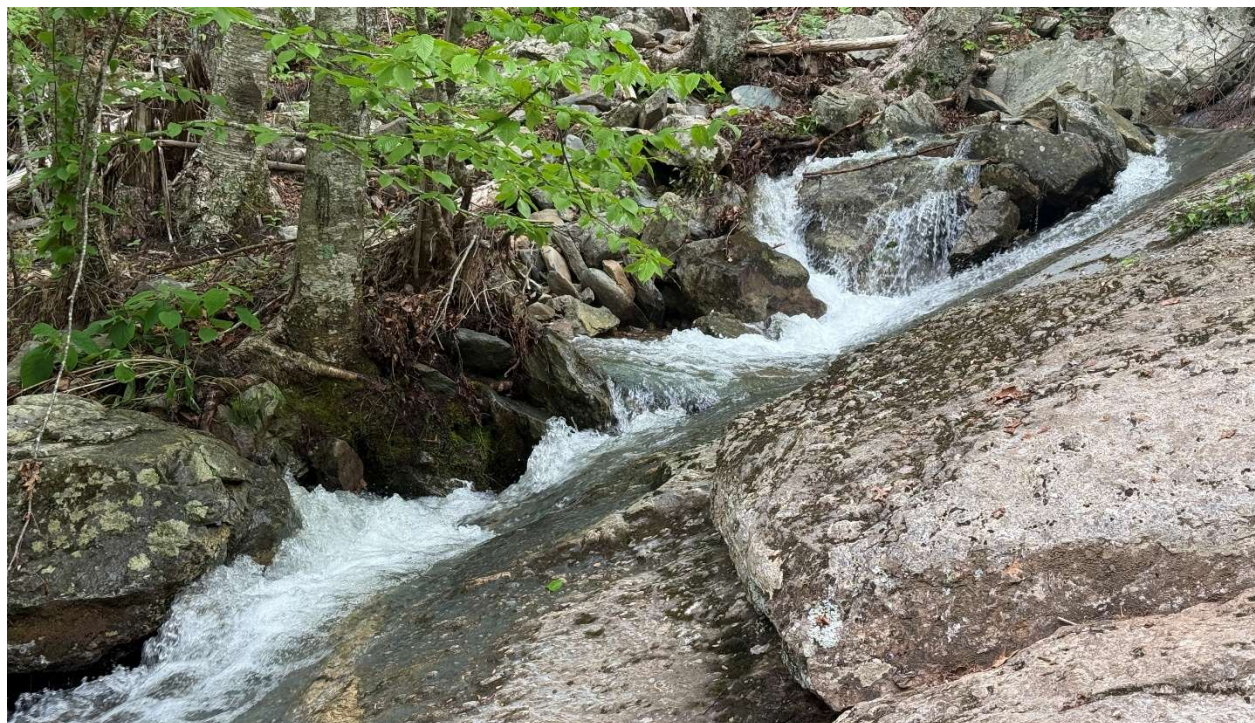


OK, time to ignore a sawhorse. I pulled on my Timberlands, grabbed the Luckless Log (my trusty 40" hiking stick, plucked from the wilds of Ontario in 1985), and set out.

The trail is about 1.4 miles long, with an elevation change of 440 feet. It's a pretty steady 6% downward grade. Steps had been built into some steeper sections, while others



simply had big boulders to clamber down. The wet rocks slowed me into a much more cautious pace; my hard-soled Timberland hiking shoes were less grippy than my HOKA hikers would've been, but the Luckless Log did a great job (as always) of creating the stabilizing tripod effect.





The upper part of the trail, where various trickles begin to blend together into a stronger more purposeful flow, were already much livelier than in my prior visits. That's the fun of the DHFT, watching pencil-thin streams become wider and wider, faster and faster, and louder and louder as you progress downwards.

























There were park workers working near the very bottom of the path, and I did not want to risk their ire by strolling past them on this “closed” trail, so I discreetly turned back. The final clearing, where the wide, flat bridge crosses the river, may have been underwater. The bridge was quite low anyway, if I recall correctly from last time, so the added rainwater may well have overwashed it. Possibly that was why the trail was closed in the first place.



So, content with what I had seen, I hiked the mile-plus back up to Maxx and moved onward. I had no reserved host for tonight. I'd be relying on the generous hospitality of the good folks at Cracker Barrel, up in the panhandle of Maryland, for my SFTN.

There was a rather odd destination planned for tomorrow.