
Lost Keys



Robert C. Byrd 100 Meter Steerable Telescope

It must have been during the summer of 1961, after I completed Russian language school at Indiana University, when I drove to Green Bank, West Virginia to visit my sister Leona and her family. Green Bank is located in Pocahontas County, in a valley between two ridges of the Allegheny Mountains. It is within the "National Radio Quiet Zone," making it a good location of the Radio Astronomy Observatory. My brother-in-law, Howard Brown, started a career at the Observatory in 1961. My nephew, Tom Brown, was 12 years old at the time. He wanted to take me to a high point called Asbury Knob near the southern end of the valley where one can look to the north and see a good deal of the valley which is roughly eight miles north & south and only one to three miles east & west.

I borrowed Howard and Leona's car, and Tom navigated me to Asbury Knob. We parked beside the road and hiked up a steep hill to the top.

The hillside was covered with thick grass, at least a foot or more in height. The view from the knob was indeed impressive. Tom pointed out a number of sights in the distance and I regret not having a camera with me. When we headed back down the hill, we started running which was a mistake, because both of us lost our balance and fell. We ended up just rolling down the hill in the tall grass. When we got to the car, I reached in my pants pocket for the keys and they weren't there! They must have fallen out as we were rolling down the hill.

After a frantic and unsuccessful search for the keys, we decided to start walking because it was starting to get dark. We didn't walk very far before coming up on a farmhouse. The lights were on, so I knocked on the door, hoping that the occupants would let me use their phone to call my sister. A lady came to the door and when I asked to use their phone, she said, "Land sakes, child! There ain't a phone within miles of here." They were eating dinner and offered us something to eat. After dinner, the farmer drove us back to Green Bank in his pickup truck. There's nothing like the hospitality of mountain folk.

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