

Maureen had the best spirit. Mike had the best wine. Karen had the best dinner meal and I, well I drove. And the drive to Irwin, Tennessee is an easy one. We left Richmond on Monday and returned on Friday. The October weather was cooperating. The directions instructed us to cross the railroad tracks and turn right at the small sign that said Cantaroso Farm. When we did that, the first thing we saw was a long line of beehives across the field and the Eastern Tennessee Mountains surrounding us. Our cabin, the place where we would be living for the next three nights, had a porch spanning its front. There were chairs and a grill on the porch. Another smaller cabin was near by. A fenced garden sat on the other side of our parked car. The Nolichucky River was over somewhere across the drive and is one of the boundaries of this eleven acre farm.

The cabin we reserved accommodated the four of us comfortably. I had a double bed nearest the coffee pot – strategic move on my part. Mike occupied the other double bed and Karen and Maureen each got the extra long bunks. There were plenty of pillows, blankets and towels, cups and saucers, plates, cooking utensils, microwave, toaster oven, refrigerator, coffee and tea, heat, table and chairs and free wi-fi. The bathroom could have been a little more private, but no one heard even a burp from the composting toilet.

At the end of each hiking day we drifted over to the bank of the Nolichucky River to sit and lose ourselves in the power of the rapids and the beauty of the light. The owners of Cantaroso Farm and Apiary are friendly and will sell jars of their delicious honey. They also own two dogs and a couple dozen chickens, both of which freely roam.

Several AT hiking trails are near by and there is shuttle service. My favorite hike was to Beauty Spot. The first half of this hike is an ascent up along a forested trail – pleasant enough. When we reached the top we found the mountain to be capped with a very special headpiece, a fir forest. It was almost regal with its quiet countenance. The filtered light had a delicate quality. I felt like I was in a library draped in velvet. We moved across this fir library with eyes wide-open taking in its special beauty. Once we crossed this holy summit, however, we couldn't believe what met us on the other side. We went from luxurious, dimly lit comfy fir to sunny, exposed rock and bare, twisted, stunted trees! Who knew! Watch your step on this descent. Eventually the trail leveled out and became grassy before another ascent, though not a challenging one. We could tell that we were getting close to our destination as lovely views began to unfold around us. I will never forget Karen's voice as it and she strode across the summit of Beauty Spot with perfect justification. Beauty Spot succeeded in realizing every one of Karen's OMGs.