This is the record of my trip around part of North Carolina with Jeremy. After my Amazing Race log was so well received, I decided to do another one. Unlike the race log, which placed a great emphasis on thoughts, feelings and narrative, this trip was not particularly exciting, but is more a photographic collection of our travels. I have always felt that photo websites are lacking in continuity because apart from the captions, you never really know what happens between photos and how they connect. After looking over this to get a better idea of what we did, you may be interested to look at the better (and different) shots on my photo site.

**Preparations (or lack thereof)**

Our trip to North Carolina was not exactly the most elaborately-planned affair. I’d been wanting to get out of Augusta for some time, since I didn’t forsee having a week of free time ever again; I just didn’t know where to go, or who to go with. So I was pleasantly surprised to get a message from Jeremy, saying he was all set to go. And we went.

Later on, he told me that I owed the pleasure of his company to a fortune cookie he had picked up that morning. This cookie continued to dictate his actions for the rest of the trip.

We started our little expedition at Greensboro. How did we come to choose a place in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do? Simply, it was the mid-point between Charlottesville, VA and Augusta, GA. We met on Wednesday evening, took out the maps and guidebooks, and began planning the rest of the trip.

```plaintext
chanjed: how long you planning on gg on a road trip? when does your course start again?
n dru1: course starts on 26th
ndru1: i won't go on road trip unless i have company ...
i'm making a day trip tomorrow
chanjed: righto.....i'm game to go, just need to be back for a meeting on sunday morning
chanjed: i'm ready to go in fact.
ndru1: serious? so we can meet tomorrow?
chanjed: how we wanna meet?
...```
Thursday, 21st August 2003: Greensboro to Asheville

We started the day at the nearby town of Winston-Salem. In 1913, the industrial town of Winston merged with the Moravian settlement in Salem (shalom or ‘peace’ in Hebrew) to produce the twin city of today. We wanted to visit Old Salem, which was a showcase of Moravian history, as well as their deep love for the arts, music and education. The Moravians came from Pennsylvania, but unlike the Amish they do not reject technology, which is probably why the town was more an architectural preserve than a chance to experience their lifestyle.

After about two hours of walking around, we hopped back in the car and proceeded to the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the most scenic drives in America. As luck would have it, we encountered plenty of mist and fog and not much view. (Sort of reminds me of my trip to the Skyline Drive in Virginia last year.) Somehow the weather here does not approve of me enjoying scenic drives. After a while we stopped getting out at the ‘scenic overlooks’ because everything was blanketed in grey.
Our next stop was the Blowing Rock, an interesting geographical feature in which the rock formed a natural blow hole, and forced winds through and up it at tremendous speeds. Legend has it that even a person that jumped in was once blown back to safety. But when we got there, we were put off by light rain and the $6 admission, and decided to give it a miss. It was only on consulting the guidebook later that Jeremy realized this was the biggest attraction of the entire parkway, and that he had even seen it featured on a documentary! We really kicked ourselves for being so cheapskate and lazy. What we did see, however, was the lovely town of Blowing Rock, which had a very picturesque European alpine feel to it. We grabbed lunch at an oyster bar there before heading on our way.

After one disappointment, we had few qualms about paying the $12 fee to enter Grandfather Mountain. This was the highest point along the Parkway, and featured a swinging bridge 1 mile in the air. On the way up, we had some fun posing with the rock formations. At the top, we checked out the bridge and took a hike down to the nearby waterfall. We were none too impressed with it, but later we realized we had only seen the upper falls, and it was the lower falls that were much more spectacular! Doh! Then on the way down, we stopped in at the museum and admired the many life-like models of the area’s flora and fauna.
And then at last, we were on the road to our final destination, Asheville. If I had thought that driving a manual car in Singapore’s traffic jams was bad, I soon discovered something equally terrible: the small winding mountain roads. Not only did they require constant clutch control, they were quite nauseating as well!

We had been looking forward to our 3-star hotel all day, and after a hard day’s traveling it was quite a relief to get in. We couldn’t tarry long though, and we quickly rushed out to the cybercafe to book the next day’s lodging – and we got the 4-star Hilton in Charlotte for only $40! What a steal! Fully satisfied with ourselves, we grabbed a sumptuous dinner at a nearby Japanese steakhouse, and then headed out to explore the nightlife. After walking around the seedier parts of town, we finally settled at a Jazz/Blues bar to the tunes of Dixieland from New Orleans.

**Asheville to Charlotte**

Our second day was supposed to be ‘activities day’. We started by driving out to Chimney rock, which commanded a good view of the surrounding area. We had a very interesting trip in an elevator shaft bored straight up through 26 stories of solid rock to get there! Then we did a 1-hour hike in just over half the time, to get a glimpse of a waterfall that was “twice the height of Niagara”. What bullshit, maybe the top was twice the altitude of Niagara, but then the plunge pool must have been five times higher than Niagara’s. We couldn’t dawdle there too long because we were in a rush to get to our next activity: whitewater rafting.
Strangely, it was at a gas station that I had perhaps the most memorable experience of the trip. I was filling up the tank when this guy comes up to me and says he’s lost his wallet and out of gas and could I help him get to Atlanta? Naturally, I refused flatly; I’ve been well trained in Philadelphia to reject any such advances without even really listening to their sob stories. So I was just standing there filling up and looking at these two guys. The white one was in a white shirt with a colorful dragon and looked liked some Eminem wannabe, and his black friend had his hair done up in dreadnoughts and they both dressed like big, bad, tough guys. Except that they were slouching against their car looking really forlorn and pathetic. So then I figured, what the heck, I’m still really grateful to all the people that helped me out on the Amazing Race, it really wouldn’t hurt to spend $15 or $20 and make someone’s day. So I did that, and they were completely stunned, but it was a nice feeling. What goes around comes around right? The funny thing is, I still don’t see the entry for either tank of gas on my credit card bill – maybe the company thought that two entries from the same time and place must be fraud!

We went rafting on the French Broad River, which was rated class I-III. This meant we had to perish any thoughts of getting flung out of the raft by raging rapids, since that would be class IV or V, I suppose. The ride itself was pretty tame, and the best part was when the guide said we could get out of the boat and go over a teensy weensy waterfall with nothing but our life vests. It was really quite an interesting experience, pity no one else wanted to do it. After that was all done, we got back on the road and headed for Charlotte as quick as we could.

At the Hilton, we made the mistake of asking if we could pay be traveller’s check. This caused the receptionist to pull up the bill, and as she said, “Oh, you’ve already paid,” we both noted the look of disdain on her face when she realized just how much we had paid. We snuck off to the room as quick as we could and we were pleasantly surprised to find a high-speed internet connection waiting for us! This was class indeed. But we didn’t want to waste anytime, so we just grabbed our cameras and set off to explore the city’s night skyline. Charlotte has some beautiful skyscrapers, and we had to improvise different ways and means to keep the cameras steady without tripods.
Walking around Charlotte, Jeremy and I developed quite a liking for the place. There really wasn’t a lot to do here, and even on a Friday night it was pretty tame. But the streets were beautiful, there were plenty of public spaces and there were also many ornaments that lent the city a great deal of artistic charm. If only Singapore could be a little more like this, it would certainly have a lot more character. We walked around for an hour or two, and then it was time to head back. Bed for me, high-speed internet for Jeremy!

The next morning, we continued our walking tour, admiring the streets again by day. I had spotted a Dean and Delucca the night before and was all set to get the chocolate bubka that Joel spent our entire Europe trip raving about. To my great dismay they were closed on Saturdays! So we just took a bunch of photos and grabbed breakfast at a café. But once again, we found that there was just nothing to do here and we ended up heading back to the hotel and watch Terminal Velocity until it was time for Jeremy’s bus.

And I guess that’s about it.