

Trips like mine to Georgia in April wax back and forth from hopeful to fearful. Smithsonian Institution spawned the idea by sponsoring a group to go to the conference to hear nine Nobel laureates of literature in Atlanta open the Olympics. But one morning in March, an express letter announced Smithsonian's withdrawal and a switch to a committee formed by the Georgia Review of Literature to take charge of the arrangements.

The other points, a trip to the Blue Ridges in northeastern Georgia and a visit after the seminar to the islands on the southeast coast, remained on my own. I used Mobil and Fromer's guide books for hotels and park locations. Toll-free "800" numbers and credit cards confirmed the reservations. In one Atlanta hotel, the clerks talked in a sultry French accent; in the out of town places, chewing gum popping and hair curlers rustling signified a country motel in a country setting. The latter, I supposed, were more comfortable in their act.

Atlanta is the busiest airport in the United States. Distances from the gates to the baggage claims make long cab rides in other cities. Air fares in such a hot spot may vary 15 percent in a day's time. Rental cars offer promotions one week and cancel all offers the next. Hertz was so busy upon my arrival that checking out a car took one hour longer than the flight from Dallas.

One other difficulty was that the day coincided with "Freaknik," the spring break celebration of the Negro colleges around Atlanta and over the U. S. The black mayor of Atlanta forewarned the universities that his city would not tolerate drunken brawling and general misbehavior. Snatches of news sounded like the citizens planned to stay indoors, or leave town. The chief of police backed the Mayor by erecting a barricade around the downtown area, putting the revelers on foot. To reach the Blue Ridges from the airport, however, meant 15 miles of driving across the city. State employees had already been sent home early and a not so subtle report from the governor's office stated the National Guard was having extra drill practice over the weekend.

Once I found the right highway, a wide expanse of open lanes greeted me. It was such a relief to be able to find the exits, the fear of drunk college kids subsided. No barricades arose and I sped from the city before the looting and rioting occurred over Saturday and Sunday in the malls and parkways.

Best choices for lodgings in the northeast part of the state are traditional southern lakeside resorts, or quaint bed and breakfast types set in Victorian mansions. I booked a room in a three story house built in the 1890's by antecedents of the present owners. The room was twice as big as the normal motel double and had ceilings high enough to watch a cloud cover form after bedtime. In the cool of

mornings, I walked along creek banks, flushing blue herons and wood ducks ahead of the trail. Dogwoods bloomed in white bells; azaleas blossomed from flaming reds to a blazing tangerine color, afire in the forest of green ferns. Honeysuckles and wild mints perfumed the air. A nine o'clock breakfast ranked with the finest inns in Wisconsin, which are among the best in America, in my opinion.

Townships varied from complete tourist renovations to undisturbed relics of the past. On one drive, I went into a drugstore built of weathered red brick and lighted by faded plate glass with a top border of blue and orange Rexall signs. Two 20 year-old girls slouched on the bench out front, smoking cigarettes and alternating their behavior and postures to fit male or female customers. Once inside, I switched my right hearing aid on the eavesdropping channel, or "E," just as the clerk, a Miss Alma, leaned over the counter and addressed a customer called Jim:

Miss Alma: "Jim, I haven't sent you a bill, because I thought when you and Sarah separated your accounts, you were separated."

Jim: "Nah, ma'am, we ain't separated, or we weren't this morning until I left the house. It's our accounts we needed separated because of her Blue Shield insurance. You haven't sent a bill in three months."

Miss A. (lowering her head but not her voice): "Wal, if you aren't separated, then your bill is going in the same envelope. That's drugstore policy, Jim."

Jim: "Miss Alma, Sarah ain't going to like you messing up her Blue Shield. Mine don't matter as I don't have Blue Shield. Poppa lost a lot of money on Woodsmen of the World in the 30's. They not gonna steal my money."

I had trouble leaving after Miss Alma counted the 10-ten cent postcards I'd bought from the front rack. Hard to leave a flashback into Mertzon of 1934. Jim wore the same blue overalls a guy named Smithy had on every day to sit in Chester's barbershop. How the mayor of Atlanta would have liked to have traded places with the mayor of this small town ...