

YOUR MONEY

Make even the smallest savings grow

27th April 2010

# Woman's Weekly

July 34p

print €2.80  
e€2.80  
usa \$5.75



## Lose a stone in 6 weeks

*without feeling hungry!*

**HEALTHY EATING PLAN**

**Caroline Quentin**  
*'I've been getting older for years!'*



**Robert Lindsay:**  
**Inside my family**

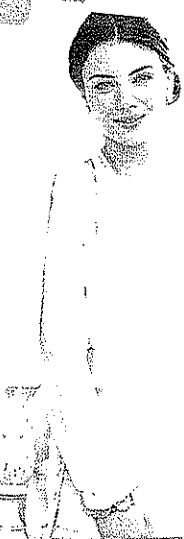
**Reunited after 60 years**

*The heart-warming story of two sisters*



3 ways to boost your memory

Spring's prettiest pastel fashions

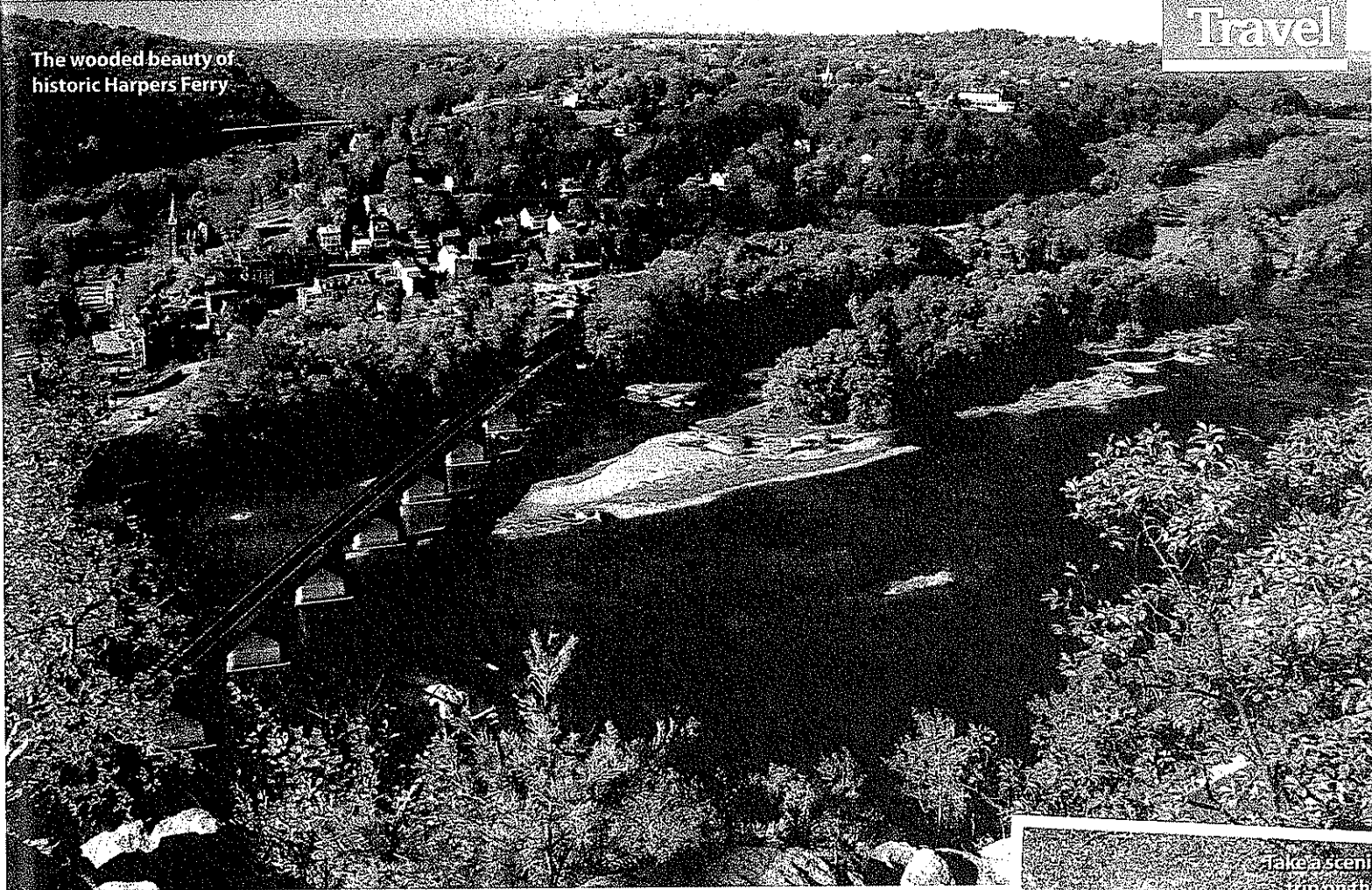


## New ideas for packed lunches

*Tasty, nutritious and they'll save you money*

9 770043 741307 1 7 >

The wooded beauty of historic Harpers Ferry



# Country roads, take me home

John Carter travels by road and vintage train through the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia

I couldn't get the song out of my head — the sound of John Denver's voice seemed to fill the car, though the radio was most certainly switched off.

*"Country roads, take me home/ To the place I belong/West Virginia, mountain mamma/Take me home, country roads."*

For there I was, driving along those self-same country roads as they gently curved and dipped through the West Virginia

landscape, skirting the banks of the Shenandoah River, heading towards the Blue Ridge Mountains. Those long and empty country roads.

**'His soul goes marching on'**

My West Virginian odyssey had begun at Harpers Ferry, where I stayed for a night at The Town's Inn, having arrived by rail from Washington. The Town's Inn is

actually a pair of houses dating from 1840 which have been converted to a charming, small hotel. Harpers Ferry, incidentally, is where the misguided fanatic John Brown led a raid on a Government Armoury, 150 years ago. He wanted to arm the slaves so they would fight for freedom, but it all went wrong and a lot of innocent people died. Not John Brown, however. He survived to be tried for treason and hanged,

and to become a martyr. The man whose soul "...goes marching on..." in one version of another song, *The Battle Hymn Of The Republic*.

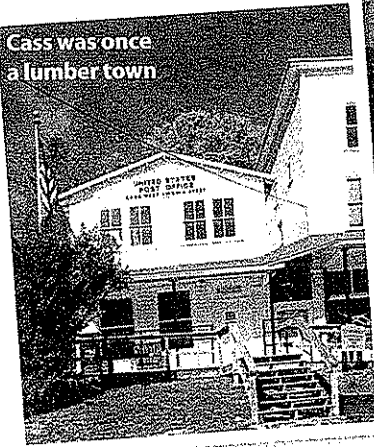
**'I heard that lonesome whistle blow'**

I was in West Virginia because, among other things, I wanted to ride on old railway trains. They have a lot of them in the state. And, like the rest of America, they also have unbelievably long ▶



Take a scenic trip on the Cass Railroad

Cass was once a lumber town



The Blue Ridge Mountains

freight trains whose mournful whistles pierce the night as they thunder through small towns that are trying to sleep. Trains so long, "...it takes two men and a boy to see to the end of them..."

In a town called Cass, after a steam-powered journey up and down steep gradients on a single track that threads through the

forests on a train designed originally for hauling lumber, Fred Bartels showed me old rolling stock being repaired in the railway

workshops. Sometimes in summer, Fred becomes "Sheriff Link Cochrane", one of a cast of characters who travel on "Murder Mystery Trains", acting out a tale from the 1920s, when Cass was a thriving community. Passengers are invited to decide who murdered lumberjack Johnny Parker, as they journey up to Whittaker station, where dinner is served. It sounds like a lot of fun, and I regret my visit didn't coincide with one of those trips. Not that I didn't thoroughly enjoy the non-murder experience.

On the *Potomac Eagle*, which starts a little way outside the town of Romney, fellow passengers helped me spot the magnificent bald eagles which live along the river valley — river and bird combining to give the train its name. I had a substantial lunch and an excellent cup of coffee on "The Eagle" before moving to an open flat-bed wagon which made eagle-spotting all the easier. It was Saturday, and Romney seemed to

be having one big street party, with yard sales and a farmers' market, and flags along the sidewalks and festooning the buildings. I came upon a group of people in Civil War costume — the grey of the Confederate Army. John McNeill was one of them, and told me they represented McNeill's Rangers, a partisan

group formed by one of his forebears. Two blocks away, and on the other side of the street, a group in the blue of the Union Army

were honouring their memories of "The Late Unpleasantness" — the Civil War that John Brown helped to start, and whose scars are still not completely healed.

### 'Nice and easy does it...'

West Virginia is the ideal destination for people who want to take things at their own pace. Harpers Ferry is just 80 minutes away from Washington by rail, or faster if you hire a car at Dulles International Airport and drive there direct. The flaw in that plan, however, is that it is virtually impossible to park in Harpers Ferry. As the whole town is a National Park, a shuttle bus service runs from a visitor centre some distance away, where parking is ample and free.

Throughout the state are masses of boarding houses and small inns which local tourist offices will recommend, though you might prefer to book ahead, using a variety of websites. Apart from The Town's Inn at Harpers Ferry,

I stayed at a guest house near Romney, the name of which — Just Far Enough Getaway — describes it perfectly. It is set among the trees on its own 20-acre site. It has beds for six, but can take eight guests if two are prepared to use a convertible sofa bed, and though you won't find a phone or a television set in your bedroom, there is a TV in the sitting room. But no phone anywhere. It is a self-catering establishment, but there are plenty of restaurants and take-out establishments not too far away.

This trip, which had trains as its theme, also gave me an opportunity to ride on America's one and only high-speed train — the *Acela Express*, which runs between Washington and Boston. The Americans in general, and Amtrak in particular, are proud of this service. And they have reason

for pride. It was a very comfortable and first-class experience, with friendly meal service and a smooth ride all the way, the journey from Washington to Boston taking six-and-a-half hours, which is very good going for that distance. But, though it is fast, it is not as fast as the French TGVs or the Eurostar. Which is a pity, because the USA would benefit greatly from a proper high-speed rail network to encourage people out of their cars and off aircraft. That may happen in the future, although the cost of laying special tracks is immensely high.

For the present, I recommend a slower-paced trip to West Virginia, a state that is too easily overlooked, for anyone who wants to visit the America of small, friendly towns — linked by the network of country roads that John Denver immortalised in song.

## West Virginia is the America of small, friendly towns

### Travel information

For general information about West Virginia, visit [www.wvtourism.com](http://www.wvtourism.com)

● Harpers Ferry: Visit [www.historic-harpersferry.com](http://www.historic-harpersferry.com)

● The Town's Inn: Visit [www.thetownsinn.com](http://www.thetownsinn.com)

● Cass Railroad: Visit [www.cassrailroad.com](http://www.cassrailroad.com)

● Potomac Eagle: Visit [www.potomaceagle.info](http://www.potomaceagle.info)

● Romney: Visit [www.cometohampshire.com](http://www.cometohampshire.com)

● Just Far Enough Getaway: Visit [www.justfareenough.com](http://www.justfareenough.com)

● Amtrak: Visit [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)

For the latest information on entry requirements for the US, visit their official website, [www.discoveramerica.com/uk/entry.html](http://www.discoveramerica.com/uk/entry.html)

