The object of my desire was silver and riveted.

A decade ago, Airstream introduced a small, utilitarian trailer called the Basecamp. The beautiful, streamlined pod turned heads on the highway. Inside, it had no bathroom but the easy-to-clean, minimalist interior was perfect for muddy and sandy gear. The recession-era trailer was in production all of two years. The company built a couple hundred units and stopped in 2008 because of the slowing economy.

When I visited the Airstream factory in Jackson Center, Ohio, four years ago, I saw a Basecamp on the lot and fell in love. Back home in the District, I scoured
Rustic luxury in the rearview

AIRSTREAM FROM F1

the Internet for one, but before I found my dream trailer used, Airstream announced that Basecamp was coming back new. The company introduced an updated version, hoping for a more receptive market.

The 2016 Basecamp (MSRP $35,900) is 16 feet long and weights in at just 2,585 pounds, the lightest in Airstream’s fleet. In October, the first units rolled through the doors of dealerships, and there’s been a wait list ever since.

I wanted to give it a whirl, so I coordinated with Airstream. At Safrord RV in Thornburg, Va., my friend Greg and I picked up the trailer, which looked like a distant, futuristic cousin of the iconic Airstream. Unlike the older Basecamp, it has a full bathroom, water tank and all sorts of innovative features, including solar panels on the roof to fuel the battery and an interior shower head that snakes outside for a rustic cleaning. A technician set the thermostat and explained that as we drove, the propane tanks would essentially preheat our living quarters. He showed us the USB ports, lock box for our valuables and Bose Bluetooth speaker that detects music-playing devices.

“For the glampers in all of us,” Greg quipped.

Almost 20 years ago, we spent a month together in Airstream; he was competing in the Camel Trophy adventure race and I was racing. I didn’t know him well until we reconected a couple of years ago and relived our adventures: pitching tents in snow, wearing the same clothes for weeks, driving Land Rovers over rocks and through mud. So when Airstream asked me what kind of tow vehicle I’d like to borrow, for old time’s sake, I chose a Land Rover.

A mountain retreat

Greg took the wheel, and we left the dealership in Land Rover’s Range Rover Supercharged LWB with a beagle and two bikes in the back, the Basecamp in tow. We had planned a full weekend of camping, cycling and paddling in North Carolina’s Outer Banks, but Hurricane Matthew foiled our plans. At the last minute, we set our sights on the West Virginia mountains.

By the time we arrived at Gaunna Valley Resort State Park in the northeastern part of the state, it was dark. We unhitched and leveled the trailer, connected its electrical cable, switched on the lights and moved into our home away from home for the next three days. The trailer is gas stove for hot chocolate with mac and cheese, we awkwardly converted our dinette table and benches to a platform for our two sleeping bags. We could have fit a third, cozily.

It was a clear, chilly night, and as we walked to the campground facilities with toothbrushes, we looked up to see the Milky Way. “It’s not quite Patagonia,” Greg said. “But it’s pretty nice.”

On our walk, we laughed about the luxurious, semi-automated Range Rover and wondered how it would do off-road. Maybe Land Rover had gotten soft over the years. But then, so had we. Instead of melting snow for our hot water, we turned a knob on the kitchen counter. Greg drew the line at some luxuries. He made it clear that, even in the middle of the night, he wouldn’t use the trailer bathroom. I, on the other hand, had no problem with our posh facilities.

In the morning, the blackout curtains and tinted windows let me sleep two hours later than usual. I woke to the sound of rain pattering on the roof and RVs pulling out of the campground, their drivers protesting the foul weather. I was thankful for our climate-controlled refuge as I looked out the panoramic windows to the dripping-wet fall colors.

Although the mod Basecamp was built with many conveniences (a two-burner cooktop, a full bathroom, LED lighting), it blessedly doesn’t have extravagances such as a flat-screen TV or fitted sheets. The trailer is meant to be more rugged than its brethren silver trailers, and it passed the test in several categories, but not all. The gray-and-red color scheme is well-suited to hide the dirt from the outdoors. The rear cargo hatch ostentiously makes it easier to load gear such as bikes and surfboards, although we never figured out what gear would go once the space was filled with humans. The interior is full of handy cargo nets and bungee cords for storage. But one overheard zip net broke on its first use (stowing part of the convertible bed, as the technician showed us) and made me wish that Airstream had skiped the chance to ask the obvious question: “I didn’t want to track mud inside,” he said. I snickered into my sleeping bag and fell back asleep.

The rest of the weekend, we made peace with the wet weather and split our time between the trailer and other indoor locales — the resort hot tub next to the campground, hot drinks at Tip Top in Thomas and dinner down the street at Front Street Grubbers, my friend Justin’s new store and cafe. I showed him a picture of the trailer. His eyes widened, and he exclaimed: “RoboCop!”

On our final morning, we packed up before daybreak and I insisted on re-hitching the trailer myself. A couple of years ago, I struggled with the hitch on a 22-foot model, but this one is more user-friendly. It took nearly 30 minutes of repositioning the SUV by fractions of an inch to align the parts, but that would get easier with time. My confidence was restored.

Driving out of the mountains, I was amazed by how many times I forgot about what I was towing behind me. I barely noticed its weight when I turned or braked.

Unhitching the Basecamp at the dealership, I felt a wave of gloom, like I was returning to a toy with which I hadn’t finished playing. I drove out of the parking lot slowly, considering turning back. It would be so easy now, I thought, to add my name to the waiting list.

Kaplan is a writer based in the District. Her website is melaniekgkaplan.com.