

# CRUISING CAROLINA

## Fock 1: Parkway Putzes



The problems with Carolina started in Virginia, but they were still Carolina problems. A nice mostly-highway route had been plotted that would reach Brevard NC around sunset-ish. Brevard, specifically Pigsah National Forest, was Skott's latest home. Quite literally a log cabin deep in the woods, it was said to be a Waldenesque place. Skott's descriptions were intriguing, and I was eager to see it.

Things were rolling along on "schedule," with most of Virginia in my rear view mirror, and an expeditious route ahead. But, of course, I screwed it up.

In mid-Spring, Skott had sent out directions to his cabin, giving the option of (a) highway or (b) parkway (Blue Ridge) routes to whomever was inclined to come a-callin'. I wasn't on either of his alphabetic routes, but was having good fun fashioning my own. Needing some gas, and answering Walt's request for service, I pulled off at the penultimate exit in Virginia and decided to call Skott and apprise him of my progress. After all, we had not actually spoken of my visit directly, having only arranged it via emails, and, though it was all right as we had laid it out, it never really seems official until you hear the words directly from the penguin's anus.

Why is it that so many animals whose names begin with the letter P tend to be somewhat comical? Penguin. Pelican. Pig. Possum. Parrot. Platypus. All fall in the God-had-some-fun-with-Creation category. They waddle, they have funny chins, they snort, they play dead, they squawk and talk, and ... uhh ... they do whatever the hell platypi do.

Of course, the Panther is not too funny, and that begins with P. Neither was the Pterodactyl, but that's a goddamn cheap use of the letter P anyway.

It's not atypical, really, though. P, which is a fine letter in many cases, is too often a pathetic sponge. It is pitiful to watch that letter ply itself onto others in the preposterous pretense of diphthong. Why does it need to do that? It has power. It has punch. It has pizzazz. Little kids love it because they can spit all over you when they say Pretty Pink Petunia. It is a vegetable. And it is the word for urinating. That's one versatile letter. (We won't even talk about prick, penis, and pussy. Will we?)

As a letter, P *seems* popular, so I was stunned, aghast, and even flabbergasted when I discovered that it ranks only 19<sup>th</sup> in frequency of use, accounting for only 1.9% of all the letters used. With that in mind, I could sympathize with P's pathetic attempts at belonging wherever it can. I mean, even G ranks higher!

P tries to be an S. An S!!! How ridiculous! Psychiatry and psychology, psuck my pshlong, please. Whatsamatter, would Sychiatry be too hard to understand? Would you be syched out by -- or in synch with? -- Sychology?

Even worse, P teams with H to become an F. Now hold the phucking phone on this one! What deformed slug came up with Ph = F?? Puh-huh does NOT equal Fuh! Physical should be Fizzikle. Phantom should be an F word. And it's everywhere! Beginning, middle, end! They shamelessly latch on to one another with total disdain for poor F's rightful domain. Elefant. Epitaf. Fotografy.

But P is also p, which means that it is one of only five letters that dip below the line in lower case. Tellingly, none of them rank in the top 16 in usage. People don't like that. What kind of subversive shit is this, I remember thinking when I first learned to print. Why the hell can't these damn letters just all stay between the stupid turquoise lines? Why do they dive below the boundary, into the unclean sub-linear space?

I faced such transgressions with distrust: why did they put lines on the damn paper if the letters won't even stay between them? Most of them fit just fine and dandy, so there was a rogue element at work with g,y,p,j, and q. The word "gypsy" really freaked me out. I sometimes used to drag the tail of the s into the underworld too, just so all five would cross the bottom line. (Don't tell anyone that though, ok?)

Sooo ... when I went to call Skott to confirm the when and where of our reunion, I met frustration. My cell phone was in a No Signal zone, so I had to go back in time and use a pay fone. It felt really

strange, pumping coins into a metal box just to talk to my friend. I had done it for 97% of my life, but already it felt like I was visiting some Civil War display or something. At any rate, there also must have been something amiss in our transmission. Or there was just some karmic interloper at work.

Skott and I swapped pleasant banter, then he asked if I was on the Parkway. I said, no, I'm on I-77, about to enter North Carolina via Fancy Gap. Then we talked some more, and he asked again if I was on the Parkway. A tad perplexed, I reiterated my previous statement. So, we chatted for another couple of minutes, and he asked, "So, you're taking the Parkway, right?" This time, I firmly and definitively stated that I was not, and that I would see him before sunset.

Opening a fresh cold one, I returned to the highway and prepped myself for the state change. I got about four miles down the road, when a large brown and white sign beckoned me towards the Blue Ridge Parkway. Despite my assertions that I would be avoiding this road, there was a strange pull to it. Maybe there was some cosmic reason why Skott kept believing I was taking it.

So, with a shrug, I adopted the Parkway as my route, and the planned, expeditious I-77S to I-40W course – three hours, tops – became 200 miles of dealing with some of the Worst Drivers In The World. Or, at least, the worst that would be encountered on this Roadrage.

I suppose many of the aggressive lane-cutters that fill Boston's roads would be generally considered worse, but I wasn't in Boston, was I? No, I was in North Carolina, and The Worst Drivers In The World only refers to The World As It Currently Affects Me. That might seem like kind of a narrow and self-centered view, but these are my damn Blings, who the hell else would they center around? :-P



So, anyway, what made these road-ents so bad, was their total lack of hill savvy. Now, the Blue Ridge Parkway is a radically rolling, switchback-filled, two-lane road that was designed for casual, unhurried cruising. It is also Beee-yoo-ti-full. Rhododendron bushes are ubiquitous, often standing twenty feet tall or more. Scenic Overlooks seem to sit near almost every turn. Even in the haze of high humidity - a circumstance unknown in the western scenery

that lay days ahead - the tree-covered hills and valleys made for sensory-soothing scenery.

There was a very bad strategic blunder being made here: trying to "make good time" and enjoy the scenery too. Bad concept, Richard. And that is what made these drivers The Worst. Given the hilly terrain, momentum was important to efficient travel, especially in a large non-zippy vehicle. On open stretches, I would let Blue Man have an easy roll down the hills, but begin to squeeze the gas as I approached the bottom of a valley, in order to gain some velocity into the next long hill, then keep up the gradual squeeze as needed for constant speed maintenance. It worked very nicely indeed, so much so that I usually was able to back off the accelerator before I even crested the hill.

Howevrrrr, time and time again, I would ride up behind these Road Retards, Pavement Pinheads, and Motoring Morons who had no clue about how to handle hills. [Is that a little too much alliteration??] And they all had the same bonehead strategy. They would zoom away from the top the hill, as if trying to be sure that I would not be able to pass them, go into Coast Mode halfway down, and keep coasting into the next uphill. Of course, there was this little thing called GRAVITY that they failed to take into account, and they would begin to s--l--o--w down. Invariably, my steady pace would catch me back up to their dumb asses, and I would be forced to actually apply my brakes on an **upward** slope and lose all my prized momentum while they foundered around for first gear and made the clumsy attempt to climb back up over 30 mph. It was infuriating, and I really can't understand what the hell they were thinking.

That said, I'm not sure that it would be a good thing if everybody drove like I do. Instead, I think everybody (except you all, of course) should just stay the hell off my roads! After all, my tax dollars are paying for them. My taxes don't pay for defense and weapons and stuff. Nor do they pay for phony political mumbo-jumbo. Not even health-related stuff, at least not until those bastards get serious about curing diseases instead of just coming up with lifelong medications that cost a small fortune and keep the disease "in check" -- and swell the pockets of all the despicable phonies in the vulturic and parasitic health insurance industry. What a throng of thieves they are. They don't want to cure diseases, because they get no money from healthy people; they have to keep enough ill people around to pump up their multi-billion dollar industry. So fuck them with a football: they don't get any of my tax money either.

No, all my tax dollars go to highway maintenance: keeping the roads a smooth treat for the meandering motorist. At least that's what I choose to believe, and don't try blaming me for all that construction out there! I don't pay that much in taxes. You can't pin the Big Dig on this doggie.

I probably pay about a month's salary for one of those human signpost people that you see whenever a two-lane road is narrowed to one lane by construction. You know the kind: they stand there all freaking day, and every five minutes or so they turn their sign around so it says "Slow" instead of "Stop" and vice versa. What a godawful boring job that must be! An eight-hour shift doing that? Ugh. And they tell their friends, "yeah, I work construction, I'm exhausted" like they're tearing up the pavement with their teeth or something.

I did see one guy who had that beat though. He was lounging in his black '82 Firebird, with the sign propped up out the back window, and he'd simply reach behind his head and twist it when the walkie-talkie told him to. To me, the sign worked just as well, so he might as well be comfortable. Yeah, I think my taxes pay his salary. So he can stay on my roads too...

The Blue Ridge Parkway was flowing along well by 4:00, and it became exercise-and-lunch time. Breakfast had been at 10:45, so 4:00 worked well for lunch. Roadtrips are not slaves to set meal times. You eat when you feel like eating. Sometimes it's on the fly. Many a time, a turkey samich – with mayo – has been constructed and chowed without breaking cruise control or leaving the fast lane.

Sometimes, though, it's just good to stop and shake out the legs. Being a runner by nature, the prospect of a Roadrage month of mostly sitting – comfy chair notwithstanding (there must be a pun in there somewhere) – provoked a slight sense of guilt. To assuage these pangs of conscience, daily bouts of exercise were "planned" -- planned in the sense that I planned on doing them, but unplanned within the overall plan because the overall plan was just unplanned enough to prohibit specific planning within it.



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Anyway, Slant Rocks Picnic Area was the area of choice for this bout. Pushups, crunches and a variety of gyrations with the thirty-pound dumbbells would comprise the workout. This was pretty standard, really. Usually, an unoccupied rest area picnic table would be far enough away from any other travelers that the workout could be done in peace, with a minimum of inquisitive looks. The pushups and crunches were done on the table, and the dumbbell exercises were usually done in the "booth" created by the open van doors. It wasn't that I was ashamed or embarrassed to be exercising; it was more

because I just didn't really want to be gawked at.

So, Slant Rocks Picnic Area was deserted, which was perfect for the workout. And after a few seconds of seeking out the best workout spot, I realized why there was nobody at Slant Rocks Picnic Area: there were NO TABLES at Slant Rocks Picnic Area!! WTF is up with that, you Tarheel morons?? You designate a Picnic Area, and don't give people tables?? What are they supposed to do, just sit there and picnic in their damn cars??

That's what I did, or course, but *my* car is exceptional.