

# Bad Roads and Sucking Toads

## Fock 3: The Toad Suck Controversy

So, new tires, new window. Pit stop complete? Nahh. Let's see about a new muffler while we're at it. The credit card was all warmed up, so why not fire another volley? Just down the road from those tire geniuses was a Midas Muffler shop. I pulled in, said I thought my muffler sounded a tad loud, and that I wanted it put right. They weren't busy; only one bay was in use, but it was the only one that had a lift large enough to heft up a mighty steed like Blue Man. There was some big Dodge Ram pickup on it, and I was assured that that job would not take much longer. Eschewing the tawdry waiting room, I said, "I'll just wait in the van. Come knockin' when you're ready for me."

I left the engine and AC running, and cozied into BM's mid-section. The cooler had just been restocked, so I began the familiar chore of unstocking it, one bottle at a time. With some clock to kill, this seemed like a good time for a movie. I had brought a few videotapes with me, so I popped one into the VCP, and settled back to watch a flick. My film of choice? *Twister*. It seemed like the perfect movie for someone who was about to drive into Oklahoma's Tornado Alley in prime time mid-summer heat.

After the cow-flying scene, it occurred to me that this pickup job was taking a bit longer than promised. I sat up from my reclined position and peered out across the parking lot. Two skilled technicians were tinkering with the Dodge. A six-foot-long section of what looked like fence pipe had been inserted into or onto some unseen piece of the undercarriage. One skilled technician was leaning heavily against the pipe, and the other was wailing away at it with a sledge hammer.

The words of the Rochester mechanic who had done some pre-trip work on Blue Man came to mind: "Your muffler's not bad, but you may want to have it checked again soon." The phrase "not bad" seemed to clash with the hammering image, and I questioned the real need for the assistance of these experts. I killed the tape, climbed into the cockpit, and with a thanks-but-no-thanks wave, I wheeled on outa there and headed west to Sacramento!

Little Rock had some staying power, though; I have to admit that. I just couldn't leave that city yet. Nope, had to do that damn runnin' thing. The map showed a large park just north of the city, so I gave it a try. Burns Park, as it was called, was a huge multi-faceted recreational area that covered over 1500 acres. It had a 17-field soccer complex, two 18-hole golf courses, rugby fields, several basketball courts, a BMX track, two bocce courts, batting cages (no Eb, though), a sweet five-diamond softball area with tournament lighting, a baseball compound, indoor and outdoor tennis courts, indoor handball and racquetball courts, plus an 18-hole Frisbee golf course.

There's a small, man-made lake for fishing, 200 picnic tables, some outdoor grills, several rental pavilions, and dozens of tent and RV campsites. Among all of this, and along the banks of the Arkansas River, are 15 miles of hiking, biking, horsing, and wilderness trails through some good-sized wooded and hilly areas.

Turned out to be a damn impressive place! I kept driving around turn after turn in the winding park roads and saying, "Shit, they have this too!" They even have a full-size, functioning replica of a Vermont-style, wooden, covered bridge.



I parked Blue Man in a shady and empty picnic area, and set out for a trail run. It all suited me just fine: deep shade to keep the hot July sun off me, narrow trails to keep me slow, and total privacy so no one could see how slow I was going. I topped it off with a two-jug shower behind the van, and finally felt ready to zoom westward again.

On the way out, though, I noticed a sign for an Observation Tower across the street, so I drove up the steep driveway to check it out. The tower itself was a good climb, and when I got to the top, all I could think of was, "Why the hell would anybody want to look at this?" You could see kinda far, I suppose, but there was nothing particularly appealing to look at. It was all just bland, ordinary scenery. No big whoop. Nothing worth building a damn tower about.

So, with the sun lowering towards the western horizon, BM and I returned to I-40W.

The highway still was in disrepair. It needed a new coat of asphalt badly.

Local radio provided the entertainment as Little Rock fell further and further behind. Blandness, fortunately, did not seem to extend into the programming. There was a talk show on station KSJY, called Scott Land, I believe, hosted by some joker named Scott Anderson with his sidekicks Rex and Joel (I think it was Joel, might not be). This show crossed lines that would never be allowed most places. The banter was lively indeed. The word "titties" was the first to catch my ear. *Whoa! He just said "titties!" WTF?*

And it didn't stop there. They talked about jobs, and joked about blow versus hand. But the crowner, and I swear I heard what I heard, was the word "fuck." Twice they used it. And it was in the sexual intercourse context: *that woman could fuck!* and *I'd fuck her!* I couldn't believe it. This was Arkansas, the bland state, and they were broadcasting fuck talk. Though, now that I think about it, it is Bill Clinton's state, iddinit?

When you hear the phrase, "like white on rice," does it conjure up anti-Asian sentiment? Me neither. Yet, on that same Scott Land show, some woman called in and was livid about the use of a racial slur that had been made against Asians. The hosts were bewildered by her protests and finally calmed her down enough to get her to repeat the purported slur.

"White on rice!" she blurted out. "White on rice! Everyone knows what you *really* mean by that!"

I think the hosts were even more befuddled at that point – I know I was – and they turned against her as only radio talk show hosts can. "Would it be better if we all said 'yellow on rice'? There's yellow rice too, ain't there? And brown rice. And pilaf! "like pilaf on rice' sounds pretty inoffensive to me." I'm sure they had cut her off already because she offered no further insight.

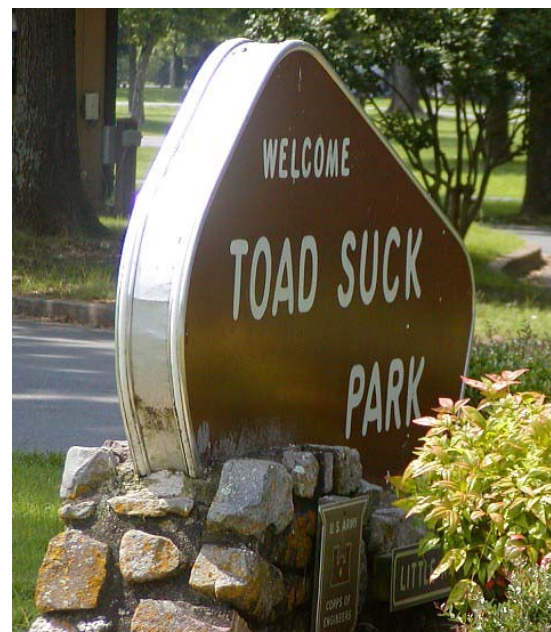
Some people put a little too much effort into being offended. Would she have thought "flies on shit" was some sort of knock too?

All day, the aesthetics of The Natural State had been uninspiring, and this ride into the sunset was no exception. The curious sight of trees growing out of lakes at least caught my interest. There were a lot of them too. What looked like fairly wide lakes sat here and there beside the highway in western Arkansas, and, of course, there were trees and shrubs and such growing all along the banks. But here and there in the lake itself, often a hundred of more yards from shore, would be a perfectly healthy, tall, leafy tree. I imagine they were rooted in a underwater high ground that was barely submerged, or that the hump they were on was normally above the water level of this shallow catch basin, but it sure did look bizarre.

But when it came to bizarre, nothing matched the name "Toad Suck Park" on a highway sign. I happened to be stopping for gas at that exit anyway, so I tried to find out what Toad Sucking was all about. You can imagine what visual images were running through my odd little mind. I was afraid to go there.

One story, in the Arkansas Historical Quarterly, says that this place was a popular spot for the bargemen on the Arkansas River to pull over and drink rum and moonshine. They are said to have "sucked on bottles until they swelled up like toads." I dunno, though.

Another customer at the gas station maintained that it was a linguistic thing: that "suck" had been the French word "sucre" (sugar, or sweet), and that "toad" was a combination of "eau" (water) and something else ending in T: *--t eau d'sucre*. I dunno, though.



The hick gas station guy, though, was armed with “the real deal” – I’m sure he gets asked the same question over and over, so he had a well-practiced reply: “There is a geographical feature called a ‘suck’: when a river was high but the water level drops, it leaves a pool on a flat shore that gets separated from the river. That pool is called a *suck*. Such a feature occurs all along the river here every spring, and they often fill up with toads and tadpoles.”

I’ll pick C.

The final two hours of Arkansas passed without making a further blip on the ramack radar. It got dark, which was fine. I didn’t feel deprived.

Oklahoma was next. Sacramento was still a long way away.

