

Utah Rocks

Fock 11: Fisher Trail and the Seven-Pack



Tall things cast long shadows, and Fisher Towers are tall things. Parked on the west side of the rippling red wall, Chief lounged in cool shade well after sun-up. There was not a cloud in the sky, the morning air was clean and crisp, and at 8:20, I set out to give Fisher Towers the good, thorough hiking that it deserved.

No other cars had pulled in yet, but I knew, with a day this good, there would be many arriving soon. It was key to get the jump on them. Scenery and solitude, baby, scenery and solitude.

I don't pack three gallons of water for a hike like this. Puh-leeeeease, people, give your body some credit: you are not going to dehydrate down to a Slim-Jim if you go a few hours without water. Maybe if you are running the Boston Marathon, or leading the pelloton through the Pyrenees, or scaling El Capitan with your fingers and toes and a couple of ropes, you might need to take in some fluids. But for a little morning stroll, be serious.

The hike would take as much as three hours, and it would be in the sun most of that time, but, come on, it's not exactly survival training. It's a leisurely walk, with rest periods whenever and wherever.

So, no, I did not pack any water, thank you, nor did I stock up on Power Bars, or bring an extra tube of 90 SPF sunscreen. I did slap some #8 on the ears and face and arms – a couple of bouts with basal cell carcinoma will impress that need upon you pretty well – but that Liquid T-Shirt crap just baffles me. If you are that afraid of the sun, stay indoors!

I did wear my wide-brimmed, black cowboy hat, but that was as much for effect as for function, maybe more. And I did carry some essentials in my shoulder bag: my special tool, and my camera, and extra AA batteries. I was NOT going to hike to some phenomenal photo spot and have my Olympus go lymp.

As for hydration, well, yeah, I might get a tad thirsty out there, but it would only make the first beer of the day taste that much better when I got back. Sometimes a little deprivation just makes the ordinary seem a bit more extraordinary.

While I think about it, shouldn't "extraordinary" mean "more ordinary than the ordinary ordinary"? I mean, so ordinary that you probably wouldn't even notice the damn thing? I think it should.

But anyway...



My first step out of the Jeep gave me a sharp reminder of that evil midnight calf cramp. The muscle was going to take a little convincing, but it was definitely making the trip, whether it liked it or not. I said, "Look, little cow, you can either hurt and have a miserable time, or you can relax and enjoy the walk. The choice is yours, but we are goin' out *there*." I even pouted for emphasis. It pouted a little, but gave no further indications of displeasure.

It didn't take long for me to be thanking the Fates for screwing me up the night before. In the bright sunlight, this place was absolutely amazing. I easily found and followed the correct trail, which, of course, I had walked right by several times – and from several different directions -- in that dusk.

The Lookout Trail led to some fantastic views, winding between towering walls, sneaking through small gaps in the rocks, and even tight-rope along some very narrow ledges that sloped towards the rock-strewn gullies below. At one point, I turned around the end of an enormous wall, and did a double take. The path seemed to go left, but that was impossible: it was waaaaay too narrow and treacherous to be such a common-man trail. There was nothing but the point of the rocky peninsula to my right, and nothing but a fifty-foot drop straight ahead, so left it had to be.

I walked it with my eyes first, tracing its route along the small protruding lip that hugged the base of a 400-foot-tall wall, and served as a sill over a rather daunting drop. Hmm. It was obvious that people had gone that way, because the dirt was worn flat by footsteps, so if they could do it, so could I. Of course, I thought, maybe they didn't all make it either. But there were no skeletons in the gully, so off I went.

The enormity of the wall had skewed my perspective, though, because once I got to it, the thread-like trail turned out to be wide enough, and the pencil-thin lip was level enough for careful, if not carefree, hiking.

About a half-dozen very strange rock shapes stood on either side of the gully. Like altars arranged at the feet of a god, they all had a large, flat rock sitting atop an oddly-twisted pedestal. They were far from identical, but they were eerily similar.



The best part of this walk was stranding right at the base of the Titan. Looking straight up at 900 feet of solid, vertically-rippled, dark red rock, was very intense. From a distance, it's impressive, but when you stand at the bottom of something like that, and you look straight up -- not at an angle at all -- and you can *still* see the top of it, waaaaaaay the hell up there, you feel damn small.

As awe-filling as that was, it really didn't hit me fully until I reached the next big turn in the trail. The Titan had been the deepest part of this

inlet, and the trail was just as narrow and intimidating on this side as it was on the other. Your attention kind of drifts to your feet on such narrow and uneven trails. This was no sidewalk. When you want to take in the sights -- and, believe me, you want to -- you have to come to a dead stop, assume a sturdy stance, and then look around. With so much vertical to gaze at, it would be easy to tilt your head back and back and find yourself toppling backwards into a big empty hole full of nothing but air, air, air, air, and then rocks.

So you hike-pause-lookaround, hike-pause-lookaround, your way onward. And sometimes you just get into Walkin' Mode, and your eyes just follow the ground for a while as you make your way up or down the twists in the trail, and you kinda forget to lookaround because the ground itself is entertaining enough.

I did this until I came to that big turn. You know, the one I just alluded to two paragraphs ago. Yeah, that one.



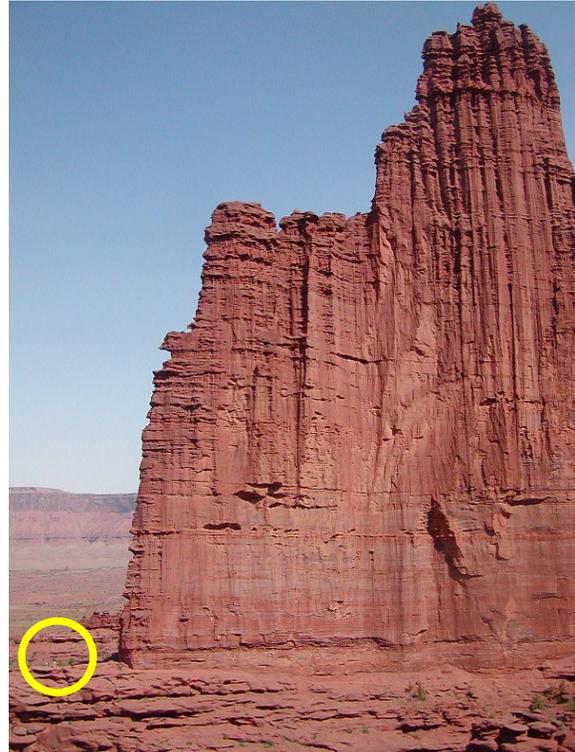
And I looked back to where I had been. I had seen, from occasional glances back at the increasingly distant parking area, that some people had arrived, and had begun their own hikes. They were well behind me, and I was confident they would not catch up, so I felt safe in my solitude. And, now, as I stood looking at that enormous red façade that I had just walked the baseline of, I found myself thinking, “you just don’t see stuff like this in Key West.”

Then I noticed the dots (in yellow circle in photo). One was blue, one was half-blue-half-white, and they were at the foot of that wall right where the trail had turned that daunting corner. My immediate thought was that someone had left two small water bottles on the ground over there. Then one of them moved, and I realized that the dots were people! Suddenly, my “wow” changed to “oh my gawwwwd.” The straight-up vertical view was indeed great, but only now did I realize how miniscule my big bad self must have looked against that background. This wall reduced those folks to fleas. And this wall (in center of photo, below) was dwarfed by the Titan! (at right)

I sat there on a rock for a moment – there just happened to be one handy – and admired the view. This wall was so damn huge, and the Titan just towered over it. How the hell did this area get formed this way? The texture and shape is so different than anything I have ever seen.

The farther out I hiked, the better it all looked. From its feet, it was sweet, but from way out on the Trail, it was a real treat.

It took an hour to reach the very end of the trail, and even though it wasn’t even 9:30, the day was



heating up fast. My shirt was good and wet under the strap of my bag, and when I reached the big flat rock that signaled the end o’ th’ road, I doffed the shirt and laid it out on the hot surface to dry out. Then I laid myself out. It was not as arduous a hike as the two at Arches had been the day before, but it was still a hilly, traily, first-thing-in-the-morning, 2.2-mile walk. I was on vacation, fer crissake, so it was time for a good, fatass rest.

The view was treeeeeemendous. Not only was I looking back at the whole array of bizarre walls and spires, but the view back beyond them was every bit as good. The Colorado Riverway wound its serpentine course between high, imposing mesas, and off out of sight to the northeast. A tall, gray ridge of



mountains stood faintly in the distance: Colorado. It was beautiful (see photo, next page)

A few tiny glints of sunlight off windshields showed me just how far from the parking area I had walked. There would be no bus heading back that way; my feet would be riding the Size 13 Saucony Shuttles. A whole pantload of driving was on tap for this gorgeous summer day, but there was not a shred of urgency in this doggy at this point. I laid on that rock, soaking in the sun, the dry air, the azure sky, the fantastic red rock formations, and – as much as all of that – the sweet, soft, soothing silence.



Most of the twenty minutes I spent lounging there were in total silence. There was only the slightest breeze, and there was nothing here to rustle anyway. At one point, the very faint sound of a faraway airliner fluttered down for a few seconds, but then was gone.

I almost fell asleep. Maybe I even did. I figured maybe it was getting time to head back. Then I heard the bird: the cheerful chirping of a single small bird that perched on the scrawny bush right next to me. I have no idea what kind it was – it wasn't a condor, I'm pretty sure of that – but it just hung out with me for a few minutes and sang its little ditty. It didn't mind when I took its picture; it just tweeted away. So I stayed a bit longer. I figured the bird came there for a reason, and it would be rude of me to disturb him. This was more his home than mine, after all.

After a while, it fluttered off to parts unknown, so it was time to do some fluttering of my own. My shirt was dry and *hot*. And my legs had stiffened up splendidly.

I took my sweet time and savored the walk back, knowing that there would probably not be a "next time" for Fisher Towers and me. I had sucked out the marrow this time; another visit would be redundant. Same with Arches. The next Next Time out here would be to explore Canyonlands N.P. more fully, or to hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

Life grows shorter by the day, the riches I had once hoped for have not magically appeared, and I am just a slow motion replay of my former athletic and energetic self.

So it goes.



It was getting close to lunchtime when I rumbled Chief back along that dirt road to Route 128. I gave a big ol' honk-n-wave back at Fisher Towers as I pulled back onto the pavement, cranked the tunes, and zoomed back towards Moab. I had a serious hankerin' for a burger and some fresh, cold microbrew.



Just as sunshine had brought out the brilliance of The Titan and its ilk, Route 128 also came alive under those golden rays. At many points, the walls of sheer red-black stone, almost shiny, totally grabbed my attention. I found myself staring at those massive cliffs as I drove, which, given the skinny and snakey nature of this road, was real dumb. But I couldn't help it; there was so

much ROCK there! It was impossibly solid. The fact that this gap even existed was remarkable.

The Colorado River appeared to be doing OK here, though it surely was a bit lower than before. Still, while Lake Powell had seemed to be twenty feet below the levels I had seen last time, this part of the river might have been only six feet or so less. Kayakers and rafters still paddled in happy groups through the river's ripples and runs.

All those nineteenth century settlers must have been totally blown away by this. They left the leafy hills of the east, crossed over the flat and grassy plains, and then the landscape just exploded with spectacular sights. What the hell did they think of Fisher Towers? Or Arches? Or the otherworldly landscape of Bryce Canyon? Or the vastness of the Grand Canyon? (*Holy shit! How are we gonna cross THIS???*)

I stopped several times to snap photos, and just dig the groovy scene, man. Sunglasses were fundamental equipment on this trip, of course. I had my favorite shades with me: bright blue reflective lenses, seated in blue-tinted genuine imitation brushed metallic (i.e., plastic) frames. They had cost me almost twenty dollars at Shades Of Key West. I don't think I have ever paid that much for sunglasses.



Of course, sunglasses got in the way of the itty-bitty viewfinder, so they usually went on top of the head, or hooked into the neck of the shirt, or hung on the strap of the shoulder bag. But this one time, as I got a particularly enthralling shot of an amazing striped wall, I was wearing my hat, was not wearing a shirt, and had left the bag in the car: no place to put the glasses but on the hood of the Jeep. (I'm sure you can guess what's coming, though probably not all of it.)

Naturally, being rapt in wonder at the scene I just captured in digits, and continuing to gaze it at it as I pulled away, it escaped my vigilance that the sunglasses were screaming in terror as they slid off the hood and onto the hot asphalt road. The windows were closed, and both the AC and CD were on, so no wonder I couldn't hear those anguished cries.



The amazing striped wall overhung the highway for several hundred yards, and with the various twists of the river-hugging road, I was a few miles along by the time I sought eye protection again. After a befuddled moment, I remembered. There was maybe a second's hesitation. I liked those glasses too much to abandon them to the desert's vultures and snakes. It would have really irked me to see some vulture flying along wearing my baby blues.

There were no westbound vehicles in sight when I bung my U-ey and hastened back east. After a mile, still no sign of anybody in that direction. Two miles, still nada. Just at three miles, a half-dozen cyclists

went rolling by. One lagged behind, and I wondered if he had stopped to scoop the shades.

But then there they were, lying forlorn and upside-down on the center stripe of the road. I slowed to a crawl, opened the door, and rescued them without coming to a stop. I had just pulled over to bang another U-ey back Moabward, when an 18-wheeler came bombing on by, with his wheels on the center line. Whew. Another harrowing incident in everyday life. All the more reason to have a frosty Moab brewery beer and soothe my nerves.

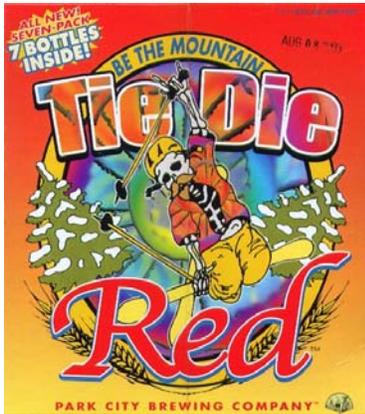
It is true, by the way: you can't beat a Dead Horse. That brew is delish. And the Jack Daniels Burger was yummy too. Moab Brewery is a MUCH better place than McStiff's! Better beer, better food, bigger place, better overall *je ne sais quoi*. AND it has a huge mosaic of a ram on the outside wall. The service was friendlier, the bar conversations were a much better quality, and they sold beer to travel. McStiff's does too; they even have big bottles. But Moab Brewery had something extra: the Seven-Pack!

Ahh, a concept whose time has come: seven beers for the price of six. The bonus bottle would have been enough to make me buy a pack, but my major curiosity was the packaging. How does one package seven beers? It's a rather awkward number to arrange. Just try ordering your pizza cut into seven slices sometime and see how easy it isn't.



So, I bought a rack of travelers: Tie-Dye Red. Exactly as the barkeep had described, "they take a six-pack and just kinda jam one in the middle." I'm sure the boxmakers had to consult some MIT engineers to get the flaps and folds just right, but, hey, that's why those brainiacs go to that damn school, to figure out solutions to life's pertinent problems.

Time was indeed slipping away by now, and there were many miles yet to drive. The Plan for Day Five called for about 450 miles. Here it was, an hour past high noon, and I had covered, ohhh, thirty, maybe. And that didn't include the 4½ I walked.



One of the unsung heroes of SW03 was small twist-tube of Blistex Herbal Answer lip balm, with SPF 15 and Aloe. This stuff is fantastic. Buy some today. Even if you live in Rochester and you won't see the sun again until 2009.

My initial cavalier attitude towards the Arizona

sunshine – *Hey, I'm from Key West! The sun don't scare me!* – had left me naively vulnerable to the higher intensity of the dry-air UV's. Just walking around Phoenix for an hour on Sunday had singed me. Sunscreen became a daily thing, but by Arches, those things that I always seem to neglect – the lips – were crispy.

A small quick-mart in Moab seemed to have just the thing for that condition -- cold beer and ice – and I was waiting to purchase them when my wandering eye caught a display for Blistex products. Hmmm, I pondered, pursing my crispy labia, maybe that dog would hunt. Then, I saw the Herbal Answer, in its pleasing little light-green tube. I saw the Aloe on the label, and proclaimed it officially Worth A Try. It rocked my world immediately. It spread like soft butter on warm toast, and it coated my bleached lips like cool icing on a fresh-baked cake. I rubbed my balmed lips together, and the pleasing herbal taste seeped onto my tongue. There was no down side to this product. I applied it liberally and repeatedly throughout the rest of the week. And I felt protected. A case of condoms in a house of ill repute would have offered no greater sense of security than this extraordinary balm.

Fully gassed, well fed, and with happy lips, I aimed Chief due north – heading 000° -- and skedaddled out of Moab on Highway 191. Just beyond the entrance to Canyonlands N.P., a sign for Deadhorse Point State Park grabbed my eyeball. I had seen a photo of DPSP somewhere in Moab, and it seemed to be the site of one spectacular bit of scenery that I did not want to miss. The Park entrance was 22 miles from 191, so I hesitated a bit, but went for it anyway.

Being a "State Park" and not a "National Park," Deadhorse Point S.P. was immune to my National Parks Pass, and I was required to fork over SEVEN dollars to enter. I tried to reason with the gate girl that I only wanted to "snip-snap a few picki-wicks and then scamper," but she seemed confused and got a tad snitty. I put seven dollars in her chubby hand and sped off at 16 MPH – exceeding the park limit! Showed her. Harrumph.

The scenic view was nice, yeah, but it wasn't the one I thought it was gonna be, and after the extreme beauty of Arches NP and Fisher Towers, it didn't really pump my nads. It was pretty much a waste of seven dollars and fifty minutes.

